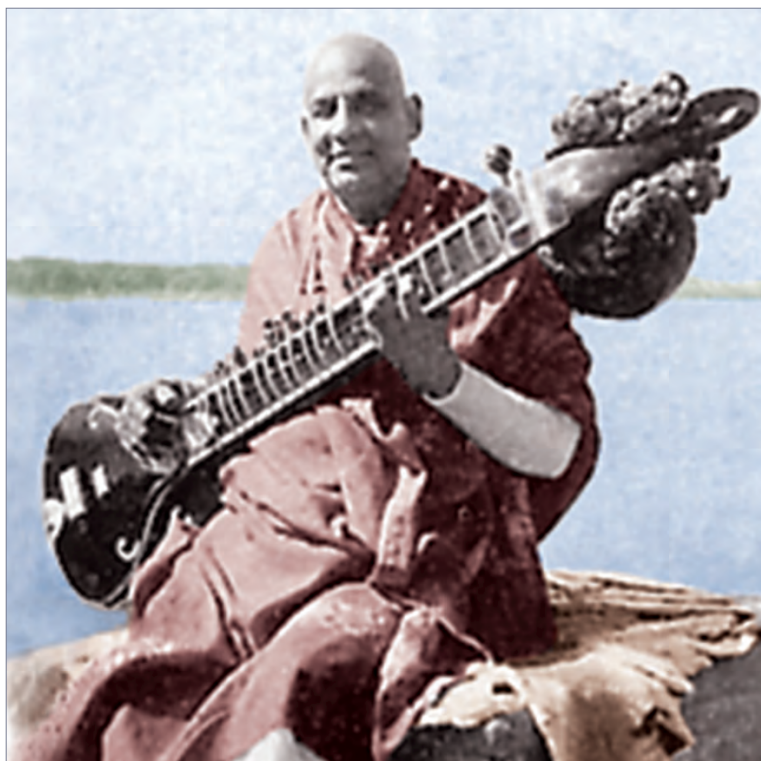


2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

Swami Sivananda's 18 ITIES & the Practice of Pratyahara

Swami Sivamurti



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Swami Sivananda's 18 ITIES & the Practice of Pratyahara



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Swami Sivananda's
18 ITIES
& the Practice of Pratyahara

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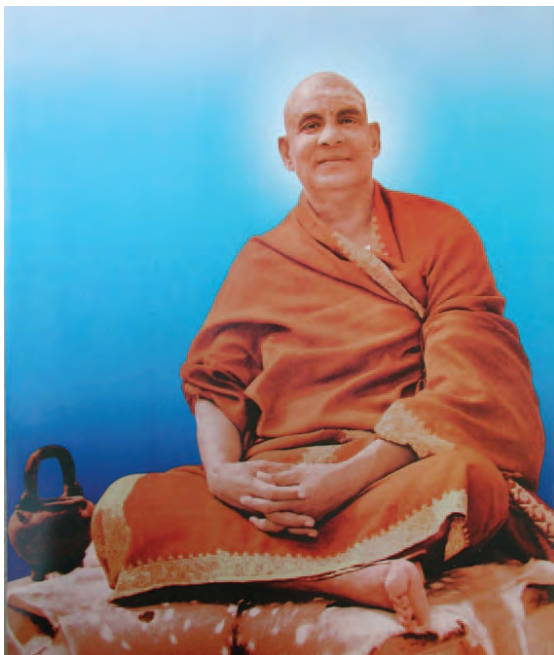
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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From 13th to 24th April 2013, Swami Sivamurti conducted a series of satsangs at Ganga Darshan. The topic was ‘Swami Sivananda’s 18 ITIES and the Practice of Pratyahara’. Her talks were accompanied by slides, video clips, practices and daily singing of the *Song of 18 ITIES* in many languages. Swami Sivamurti approached the subject in a light manner and made difficult concepts clear and accessible to all. Her wonderful humour combined with a deep understanding of human nature and the needs of spiritual aspirants made these lectures an unforgettable experience for all.

Introduction

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

There are two kinds of yoga. One is the classical yoga in which we practise and advance in asana, pranayama, yama, niyama, pratyahara, dharana, and so on. The other is the yoga of Swami Sivananda, which is the expressive yoga, and its main theme is service. As long as we follow the aims of classical yoga, yoga remains a process to be perfected, but if we follow the yoga of Swami Sivananda, yoga becomes a lifestyle. When our life begins to express yoga, yoga no longer remains a one-hour practice to be done once a day. It becomes an attitude and awareness with which we live twenty-four hours of the day. At this stage, yoga enables us to express greater creativity and participation in the world.

The final outcome of yoga is not isolating ourselves from the world, but involving ourselves more deeply in the affairs of the world, knowing our place in it, our duties, and how we can make a difference in other people's lives. This is what Swami Sivananda called the 'divine life'. As we follow the yoga of Swami Sivananda, the gross nature is transformed. As we become more sattwic, more mature in wisdom and develop greater understanding, there is deeper identification with our environment and the world. It should be clear that yoga is not a path of isolation. We do not have to escape to the mountains to experience higher consciousness. We have to escape into the world to realize higher consciousness, and this is a question of training ourselves.

Training ourselves means managing our responses and reactions, attitudes, convictions, creativity and performance. Such transformation of a conditioned nature into a flowering nature is the ‘divine life’ described by Swami Sivananda.

Swami Sivananda said that we may continue with our yogic practices of asana, pranayama and mantra, however, we should also be able to express yoga in our normal environment when we are not performing the practices. For this to happen, the yogic concepts have to be ingrained in our life. After all, a computer will function only according to its programming and software. So, we have to replace the software inside and upgrade the programming of our mind. Where do we find such software? Where do we find a program that allows us to change our computer’s performance? That possibility is seen in the 18 ITIES of Swami Sivananda:

*Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity,
Equanimity, fixity, non-irritability,
Adaptability, humility, tenacity,
Integrity, nobility, magnanimity,
Charity, generosity, purity.*

These are the 18 ITIES of Swami Sivananda which represent a new programming for our mental software. Therefore, along with asana and pranayama, the ITIES should be cultivated.

The practice of the 18 ITIES is a sadhana in its own right and it will bear fruit only if it is treated as such. *Sadhana* means spiritual effort and is the foundation of spiritual life. No *sadhaka*, spiritual aspirant, will progress without the integration of spiritual practice in his daily routine. There are four categories for the development of sadhana:

1. *Define your intention*: Sadhana is the attainment of excellence and perfection in everything that is done. It begins with involvement in constant, continuous awareness and focus. In the absence of awareness and focus, practice

is not sadhana; it is only a waste of time. There has to be awareness of the present mood and clarity of intention as to what is to be achieved.

First of all, know your intention. That is the primary requirement of starting any sadhana. There needs to be an understanding of the aim. If the intention is not clear, the journey cannot be started. In regard to the ITIES the aim is clear, namely, cultivation, development and perfection of each ITY is the goal of this sadhana.

2. *Have conviction in the practice:* The second point is the need for conviction in and dedication to the practice. One must believe that what is going to be practised will lead to the goal. Conviction and practice must go together. If something is being practised, one should believe, one should be convinced, one should know that the practice is going to lead to the goal, and this becomes the focus, the aim.

3. *Accept the change:* If some change is experienced through sadhana, some transformation, be ready to accept it and not negate, deny or confront it. Many people do not accept change. They want to remain the same with an added quality, but how can one remain the same with an added quality? If a new quality is brought in, the reflection of that quality will be seen in one's behaviour, responses, actions and performance. There has to be openness to accept the change that occurs spontaneously and naturally.

The purpose of the 18 ITIES is change, fine-tuning the personality, making the interactions in life more sattwic, and expressing one's creativity through those divine qualities. Change is what is sought, but also feared. Therefore, at the outset of the sadhana one has to know that the practice and integration of the ITIES will make a difference in one's life.

4. *Practise continuous improvement:* The fourth category of sadhana is improving one's changed nature with more conviction, faith, determination and belief. One should integrate the practice and the change into one's life, and improve on it. There is no end to improving the understanding, expression and experience of each ITY. From a

little bit less vanity to total absence of vanity is a long way, and one should not give up before the goal is reached. According to Swami Sivananda, the goal is clearly defined in the second part of his song, however, it can only be reached if ‘you practise daily these 18 ITIES’.

To start with, it doesn’t mean you have to practise all 18 qualities every day. Work with one ITY per month. Make it a *sankalpa*, a resolution. Every morning say to yourself, “This month I am working on serenity,” and remember the concept of serenity as you go through the day’s routine. At the end of the day, make a note in your spiritual diary: “For how long was I serene today?” and “When did I lose my serenity?” Don’t worry about perfecting the ITY. Even if you are able to take one step in the first month, that’s fine. After 18 months, you can repeat that ITY again. It is not a practice that you do only once and then put aside. You rotate it continuously, and in each new cycle there will be a new revelation, a new understanding, a new realization of who you are and how you can manage yourself.

The ITIES are the attempt to fill our life with positive and beautiful qualities. Working with the ITIES involves cultivating positive habits. Do not become neurotic about how to change a negative habit; just make the effort to cultivate positive habits. When you build up the positive dimension of your nature you become pure within, which enables you to enter the transcendental experience of life, the divine life. This is the practical teaching that Swami Sivananda has given to us.

Lectures

Swami Sivananda's *Song of 18 ITIES*

Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity,
Equanimity, fixity, non-irritability,
Adaptability, humility, tenacity,
Integrity, nobility, magnanimity,
Charity, generosity, purity.

Practise daily these eighteen ITIES,
You will soon attain immortality.
Brahman is the only real entity,
Mr So and So is a false non-entity.
You will abide in eternity and infinity;
You will behold unity in diversity;
You cannot attain this in the university.
But you can attain this in the Forest University,
But you can attain this in the ashram in Rishikesh.

During the lecture series, the last line was replaced by:
But you can attain this in the ashram in Munger.

Introducing the 18 ITIES and Pratyahara

13th April 2013

Swami Niranjanananda recommends to practise the 18 ITIES in the following way, “Each month, practise one ITY. If you are able to live these 18 ITIES for eighteen months, you will gain something invaluable in your life; who knows, maybe absolute *sanyam*, control of mind.” Control of mind and emotions is the goal and outcome of yoga, its many branches and practices. Without control the aspirant cannot move forward on the spiritual path.

Aim, philosophy and discipline

For Swami Sivananda the ITIES are timeless values that motivate us to live the divine life. These ITIES give three tools to the practitioner: an aim, a philosophy and a discipline to live by. Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda always emphasized the importance of having an aim in life and a philosophy to achieve that aim. The aim and the philosophy enable us to handle setbacks, the vicissitudes of life, the unforeseen and unexpected. Aim and philosophy are closely interrelated. The third tool is discipline. We need discipline in life, we need it to improve ourselves and our performance, and we need the discipline of yogic practices to develop and live the qualities of the ITIES. Discipline enables us to live the philosophy of each virtue, and to reach perfection of that virtue, even in times of strife and difficulties. Therefore,

aim, philosophy and discipline are important for the practice of the 18 ITIES.

As we work with each ITY and establish it in our life we discover how those three tools evolve and manifest. For example: we have the aim of having serenity in our life and to live serenely. Serenity is also a philosophy, which considers it worthwhile to be calm and maintain a positive outlook, rather than indulging in criticism and negativity. This idea is our philosophy. The discipline for the practice of serenity is using yoga to establish this virtue and making the constant effort to reach the goal and adhere to the philosophy.

When I first went to India in the 1970s, Swami Satyananda gave me a philosophy for living in just two sentences. He said, “Everything that happens in your life, will happen for your good. There will be nothing negative.” In those two sentences he gave me a way of looking at life which enabled me to handle the difficulties and obstacles that we all have to face in life. Each time a difficulty came, I remembered what he had told me and it helped me to see everything as a learning experience, a challenge I had to rise up to, it was my destiny, my karma. Swami Sivananda said, “For every aspirant’s success in life, and especially for an aspirant’s success in spiritual life, it is essential to develop certain cardinal qualities: virtue, strength and power are the key to peace. A virtuous person is ever happy, peaceful and prosperous.”

Swami Sivananda said that people used to ask him for specific virtues that they could develop and establish in their lives. He replied with *The Song of 18 ITIES* which enumerates the virtues that we need to cultivate, and gave us the following advice, “Take up any one virtue or ITY and develop it to a high degree. Eradicate in toto its opposite, evil quality, even in its most subtle form. Meditate on these virtues or ITIES, on their benefits and the methods of cultivating them and you will achieve success in this very life.”

ITIES and pratyahara

Swami Sivananda gave a simple description of spiritual life and the process of evolution, which was the 18 ITIES. These 18 words ending in ITY represent the flowering of spiritual life. They are the practical tools which help us to walk the yogic and spiritual path.

When we practise Swami Sivananda's yoga, we still continue with our yoga practices of asana, pranayama, and so on, but we bring yoga to another level, we bring yoga into our lifestyle. We start to live what we have learnt on a twenty-four-hour basis, and therefore Swami Sivananda's yoga reaches out into the community. We extend our awareness and see what we can share with the communities we live in. We involve ourselves more fully in what is going on in the world. This is what is called the divine life, involving ourselves in the world, being there when needed.

This change happens as we train the mind, and there are two aspects to it. The first aspect is when we educate the mind at school, college or university, when we learn how to be successful in the world and perform well. The second aspect is getting rid of the mental conditioning and programming that has become irrelevant and obsolete in our lives, so that we can free the mind and allow the self, the consciousness, to shine through an uncluttered mind.

Training the mind is learning how to handle our reactions and responses to situations, how to keep balance and be serene in situations, and how to be regular. In fact, following the 18 ITIES of Swami Sivananda is training the mind, it is a journey of self-discovery, self-management and self-improvement. This training has to be supported by the practices of pratyahara such as antar mouna, ajapa japa and yoga nidra, which are designed to internalize our awareness. They help us relate our external interactions to our personality, character, our day-to-day behaviour and to our true inner being without masks and pretence. They are ideal techniques to connect our external life with the internal life. There is mutual assistance: pratyahara practices help

us to establish the ITIES and awareness, and the practice of the ITIES in turn helps us to deepen the experience of pratyahara.

18 ITIES in a nutshell

The 18 ITIES follow a logical sequence and therefore it is always suggested to start from the beginning and move to the end.

Serenity: The first ITY to start reprogramming the mind is serenity. Serenity is to be at peace with ourselves, to be calm, unruffled and tranquil. That ability comes about when we let go of our expectations. Eventually, we let go of all the reactions that come into the mind due to expectations that we have about events, activities, people and life. Generally we have many expectations of ourselves and others and when these are not fulfilled there is an inner reaction.

Regularity: Being regular on a daily basis is getting up, going to bed, eating meals and doing our sadhana at the same times. There is a time for physical activity and a time for mental activity. We establish that routine in life. The guru gives us the perfect example. In the *gurukul*, the guru's ashram, we see that everything runs like clockwork. The guru himself is so disciplined and regular, that it enables each and every one of us to pick up on a regular routine, and we establish regularity.

Absence of vanity: Once we have achieved success in serenity and regularity, the next ITY is absence of vanity. We must not allow this success to go to our head, become arrogant or feel vain about the fact that we have achieved some serenity or regularity. We have to treat everyone with respect, everyone with equal vision. With absence of vanity we are not out to create an impression, we are natural. Most of the time, we are trying to create an impression for other people. We are seldom natural. Actually, we are seldom ourselves but this is what we aim for when we practise absence of vanity.

Sincerity: As a result of practising absence of vanity and allowing the natural expression of ourselves to develop,

we develop sincerity. We ask ourselves, “Am I being sincere with myself? Am I being sincere with others? Or do I allow complexes, fears and inhibitions to stand in the way of my expression?” Being sincere means that we need to connect our thoughts, words and deeds. When we work with sincerity, we look at: Am I thinking something different from what I am saying, and am I acting differently from what I am thinking? Of course, we cannot be so straightforward all the time, as it is not socially acceptable, but we need to be aware of any discrepancy between thinking, saying, and doing.

Simplicity: In the effort to be sincere, simplicity comes in. When we are working with sincerity we discover that we are carrying a lot of unnecessary garbage. We have a lot of unnecessary conditioning in the mind which leads to outmoded ways of thinking that may have been acceptable earlier in our life, but are not acceptable now. The programming is still there in the mind and we have to get rid of it. This can be done by making the effort to be simple and to simplify our lives. To simplify the way we think, the way we speak, what we eat and the possessions we keep, we ask ourselves, “Do I really need all these things around me?” If the answer is no, we start to distribute possessions and simplify our lifestyle. We put into practice the idea of ‘simple living and high thinking.’

Veracity: This paves the way to becoming true to ourselves. Veracity is living without pretence, accepting who we are and what we are. A good technique to help us do this is the SWAN principle. It is a technique developed by Swami Niranjanananda, in which we identify our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. We accept our limitations, weaknesses, and the fact that we are less than perfect. Acceptance does not mean agreement. It means we recognize that the weaknesses are here at this point in time and we will do sadhana to remove them or perhaps turn them into strengths.

If we are true to ourselves, it follows that we are true to others. When applying veracity we become more aware of

our speech and decide to speak the truth which is pleasant, not the unpleasant truth. There is always a nice way of saying something truthful, without hurting, wounding or shocking another person.

Equanimity: Equanimity brings quietness into the mind and makes us more content. We feel more whole and comfortable with ourselves. Respect for ourselves and others quietens the mind. We want to be more even-tempered and not become overwrought about situations and encounters. We try to keep balance as we face the pairs of opposites: success and failure, profit and loss, praise and criticism, pleasure and pain. A balanced person is one who keeps equilibrium no matter what situations are faced in life.

Fixity: Equanimity steadies and balances the mind, enabling us to focus, be one-pointed and fixed on a goal. Fixity is being stable, constant, steady and firm.

Non-irritability: When applying fixity to achieve our goal we need to take care that we do not become rigid and easily irritated when we encounter obstacles on the path. Non-irritability is also letting things pass, turning a blind eye, not taking things personally and not taking offense.

Adaptability: Adaptability is the flexibility to go with the flow that we have developed through non-irritability. We learn to adapt, adjust and accommodate to situations in life, while taking into consideration the time, place and circumstances we find ourselves in. Consideration, respect and understanding for others develop.

Humility: Humility combines consideration and respect for others with a desire to lend a helping hand. We want to use this life not just for self-enjoyment and personal ambitions but for others. Humility enables us to recognize the importance of other people and the divinity in all. If we are humble and bend mentally before others, we recognize they too are passing through the same tests that we are passing through.

Tenacity: Humility develops inner strength and stamina, which gives rise to tenacity. Tenacity is a sister virtue of fixity.

Through tenacity we learn to hold on firmly to our goals, to our principles and values in life no matter what. Tenacity gives us the power to endure until our goal is reached.

Integrity: Integrity is an expression of dharma. We become a person of character who follows *dharma*, righteousness, who tries to do good and help others in any situation. In a darshan with Sri Swamiji some years ago, someone asked him, “What is my dharma?” He said, “Our dharma, the general dharma of all of us, is to lend a helping hand, to do what you can to uplift others, to be there when they need it.” Swami Sivananda says, “*Dharma* is that which upholds the world. It is the virtuous life that upholds the world and enables us to go on, evolve and progress.”

Nobility: Integrity and abiding by dharma develops nobility. A noble person is loyal, committed, dedicated and devoted to virtue. A noble person always sees and appreciates the good qualities in others, not the lapses or bad aspects. Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Satyananda have said that even though a person may have many negative traits, if we focus on the positive trait then that positive trait develops and the negative part will start to slip away. With the attitude of nobility we allow other people to develop their beautiful qualities.

Magnanimity: Magnanimity is nobility in its broadest sense. A magnanimous person doesn’t dwell on little or insignificant things. He or she is beyond them, is broad-minded and has an open heart, ignores the faults of others and is able to forgive and forget, and understands that whatever happens has to happen. There is no time for holding onto grudges or clinging to petty insults. There is too much to be done in the world, so move on.

Charity: We understand through charity that the physical, mental and emotional wealth that we have attained in life is held in trust; it is ours only to share, so therefore, we give. It is the “Give, give, give” of Swami Satyananda, and the “Do unto others as you would have done unto you,” of Christ.

Generosity: Generosity is the sister virtue of charity. Generosity is to be liberal in our giving, to be open-handed, to be unselfish, to give in plenty, not to be miserly and to never resist a generous impulse. If we find someone needs something, we should give it and take delight in giving to others.

Purity: Giving, and living the other 17 ITIES purifies the heart. When the heart is pure our true self expresses itself. Purity is an expression of our true self in motive, thought, word and deed. Purity is the result of many efforts and trials in life.

Some people may say that purity leads back to serenity and that the 18 ITIES are a closed loop, therefore, one can start at any point. The counter-argument is that it is not easy to start the loop from purity as purity is a high state of awareness and being. It takes consistent practice and commitment to be able to experience and express purity in life.

Pratyahara or awareness

The raja yoga of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* consists of *yamas*, external disciplines and social codes; *niyamas*, internal disciplines and personal codes; *asana*, physical postures; *pranayama*, exercises using breathing; *pratyahara*, which is roughly translated as 'sense withdrawal'; *dharana*, concentration, *dhyana*, meditation, and *samadhi*, self-realization. Pratyahara is the threshold between the outer and inner yoga. Pratyahara starts with awareness which is the ability to observe the mind and the outside world. Awareness is the ability to connect with the witness inside us. Awareness is the alpha and omega of yoga. All practices of yoga, including asana, pranayama, yoga nidra, antar mouna and ajapa japa stress the importance of awareness.

Awareness is the ability to stand back and become the witness of what is going on. It creates detachment, non-attachment between us, the witness, and what is going on in the mind and around us. The space of the witness protects

us as it creates and develops immunity. If we are witnessing certain reactions or negative traits in the mind and we are able to stand back and say, “This is the mind,” then that is true awareness. With time and practice awareness deepens. When we engage our awareness we can watch the mind with much greater clarity.

It is like being in a valley and seeing the mountains from the valley, whereas if we are climbing the mountain, we can only see the small part of the mountain that we are on. When we are aware and witnessing the mountain of the mind from a distance, saying, “This is the witness, that is the mind,” it gives us the ability, in split seconds, to choose a course of action which is not a mechanical or instinctive reaction. It happens faster than the blink of an eye. Suddenly a lot of choices open up and we choose which action to take, being aware of the consequences of the action. It helps to take responsibility for our choices and our lives.



Pratyahara and Serenity

14th April 2013

PRATYAHARA AND AWARENESS

The classical and traditional description of pratyahara refers to the fifth step of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga. It is the threshold between the outer and inner world of the mind. This is an important point to understand. In the classical and traditional description *pratyahara* means 'the withdrawal of the senses from that which nourishes them, namely the objects of sense perception'. However, there is a second aspect to pratyahara in regard to the mind. The sensory recognition follows the mind, or mental recognition. Therefore, pratyahara can be understood as withdrawing the mind from the senses, thereby internalizing the mind. Once the mind is internalized, the senses will follow suit and internalize rather than keep running after sensory attraction and stimuli.

In pratyahara, we sever the link between the mind and the senses, so that the senses follow the mind. Under normal circumstances, in everyday life, the senses are our master; we are under their control. This is the root cause of our suffering and pain. We see something, we crave it and the mind is full of desire. We see chocolate, we want it. We see a beautiful sunset, we admire it. These objects nourish the senses, but in pratyahara we cut that link to allow the mind to become the master of the senses. In pratyahara,

we are aware of what is going on around us, but we are not influenced by it. Pratyahara is a state of awareness.

Awareness is the ability to know that we know. In English we use the word awareness freely and may say, “I know or I am aware that this is a watch.” However, this is not the yogic concept of awareness. The yogic concept of awareness is, “I know that I know that this is a watch.” It means we identify with the principle of the witness inside us. When ‘I know that I know’, we put space between I who am observing and that which I am observing. This is the important space that we develop, enlarge and expand upon as we deepen our awareness through the different stages of pratyahara. We become more detached or non-attached to what is going on around us and inside the mind. We develop a type of immunity to the thoughts that arise in the mind, the negativity, worries and passions. We learn to keep a distance from them. Worry, anxiety, passion, fear and guilt are there, but we are separated from them through the ability to be the witness, the ability to be aware. Once we know how to observe, we create distance similar to the feeling of being at the theatre or cinema. We become the audience and witness what is going on in our mind. We are affected by it to a certain degree, because we involve ourselves in the play or the movie, but at the same time, we know that we are not the hero or any of the actors on the stage; we are separate. We keep a space between us and the actors, so that they do not affect us deeply. We are moved by it, experience it, but it does not influence us on a deeper level. When we face challenges or difficulties in everyday life, through awareness we separate from it to see it more clearly.

When Sri Swamiji, used to explain awareness to us, he said, “Awareness is to know that you know. When you know that you know that you know, you become a guru.” He would explain, “Imagine this room is the mind, and it is in darkness, and you shine a torch in one corner of the mind, and a light appears. That light is your awareness. Awareness is like shining a torch on one aspect of the

mind.” However, as our awareness expands, that light grows and grows until it fills half the room. If the room is the mind and our awareness is expanding or deepening to that extent, we become more aware of what is in our mind, not just in the conscious mind, but in the subconscious mind which contains a complete record of everything that has happened to us since the time we were in our mother’s womb.

Samskaras

Little by little, through expanding the awareness, we become aware of the conditioning and *samskaras*, impressions, embedded in the mind. We start to understand why we are like we are. Why does one person have a fear of heights, and another suffer from claustrophobia? The answer lies in the deeper regions of the mind. As adults, we experience the fear of claustrophobia or the fear of heights, but we cannot connect that fear with what happened in our earlier life. Maybe we were locked in a cupboard, enclosed in darkness and afraid. Or maybe we were caught in a lift and had to spend some hours there, and as a result we developed claustrophobia. There are many reasons why we are like we are today. When the awareness expands we go into the deeper regions of the mind and see the cause of the effect. We realize, “Ah, that happened to me as a child, and therefore I am like I am today.”

There is a story of a swami, a doctor, who came to the ashram. He had asthma. He had been to many clinics and doctors, not only in his country, but in other parts of the world. No one had been able to cure his asthma. One day someone said to him, “There is a swami giving a lecture, why don’t you come along?” The lecture was given by Swami Satyananda. He was not speaking on asthma or a relevant subject, but a connection was made between this young man, a student of medicine, with asthma, and the guru. After the lecture, he went up to Swami Satyananda and said, “Can you cure my asthma?” Sri Swamiji replied, “Well, come and live

in my ashram in Munger for a period of time and yoga will cure it.”

He interrupted his medical studies for one and a half years and went to live at the Bihar School of Yoga. In one of the practices of pratyahara he relaxed. His conscious mind became relaxed, his awareness expanded and deepened. When the instructions were given to visualize, a scene popped up from his early childhood: he was about two and a half years old, his nurse was trying to force-feed him. She wanted to watch television and was in a hurry, so she was putting the food on the spoon and pushing it in his mouth. He didn't want to eat and was saying, “No, no.” At the same time, he couldn't get his breath because the food was going down. His breathing was becoming tight, short and superficial. That small incident from an early age, planted the seed in his mind for asthma to develop. It was after that event that he started to suffer from asthma. He had asthma all through his childhood until he came to the ashram in his twenties.

When he had this vision the whole experience came out and he saw it as if in a dream. He went through the feelings of discomfort in breathing and the anxiety he had felt. The samskara, the seed, was being released from the mind. Through awareness he was able to witness everything. The young man realized he was an adult and was witnessing a scene from his childhood. He witnessed the experience, the memory coming out of the mind and then fell asleep. When he woke, that was the end of his asthma attacks. That seed planted in his mind at an early age, being force-fed by the nurse, was the samskara that had created his asthma attacks.

Being in the present

Pratyahara starts by developing awareness. In yoga, the chief discipline is awareness. Once when touring Greece, Swami Satyananda gave a magnificent lecture in Patra, in the Peloponnese, to about a thousand people. At the end of the lecture there was a standing ovation. He walked away

quickly, as he always did from public lectures. As we were walking he turned to me and said, “Sivamurti, it doesn’t matter if no one remembers anything I said. As long as they remember one word, my lecture is a success – that word is awareness.”

At the time, I thought, “What an astounding statement.” It was a shock to me as he had been speaking about so many fascinating subjects. Now I realize, awareness changes everything, it gives us a whole new perspective on life. Awareness provides the key to managing the mind.

To be aware means we identify with that which is watching, with the process of watching, and the reactions that are coming to the surface. Awareness puts things into perspective and forces us to live in the present. The great masters have stressed the importance of living in the present. We are in the present, for example, when we are practising Stage 1 of *antar mouna*, inner silence, and are asked to become aware of the influences of the different senses: to listen, to taste, to smell. This practice is bringing us to the present. When we are asked to become aware of our breathing, each and every breath, without letting one breath escape our attention, we are fully in the present. Awareness provides the ability to be in the present and at the same time it gives a choice of how to treat the present moment.

How do we react and respond to the present moment? The first impulse of how we handle the present moment is important. Do we find it friendly? Do we find it pleasant, unpleasant, frightening or threatening? Does it obstruct us? Awareness allows us to choose our attitude. When someone says something unpleasant to us, if we practise awareness and go into Stage 1 of *pratyahara*, we have created a distance between ‘witnessing’ and ‘hearing’ what was said. We have a choice; in fact, many choices appear in front of us. We can decide to retort in an unpleasant way or in a pleasant way. We can choose to ignore the comment or make a joke of it. The choice is ours. Developing awareness gives us this ability to decide how to handle a situation.

As awareness expands and the light in the dark room, which represents the mind, continues to expand, eventually we enter into total awareness, *samadhi*. Awareness of the total mind brings us to self-realization.

Stage 1 of pratyahara

Pratyahara is a series of practices which enable the mind to internalize at will, and eventually to be aware of what is simultaneously taking place, either internally in the mind or externally, in the world around us.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

In Stage 1 of pratyahara we are becoming aware of what is happening externally, and how we react internally upon receiving information through the senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. Stage 1 is to become aware of what is happening externally. When someone speaks, we use the ears to hear it, and we observe the reaction taking place in the mind. When we see something, we realize that we are using the eyes as an instrument to see and we are aware of the reaction taking place in the mind; nothing more. The mind may be reacting positively or negatively, it doesn't matter at this stage. The important point is to be aware of the connection between what we are sensing, the sense organ with which we are experiencing it, and what happens in the mind.

Stage 1 has two points. A person is saying to me, "You are a fool. I don't agree with what you say." First, I am aware that I am hearing it through the ears and, secondly, I am aware of the reaction taking place in my mind: I feel offended, I ignore it, I feel sad, upset, I start to cry. However, I don't stop the reaction, I am just aware of it.

Awareness makes it easier for us to apply the ITIES in our lives, and the reverse is true, working with the ITIES makes it easier to develop pratyahara.

SERENITY

Synonyms

unruffled	placidity
composed	quiet mind
patience	peace of mind
tranquillity.	stillness
cool, calm and collected	at peace with ourselves

Antonyms

agitation	excitement
disruption	trouble
disturbance	restlessness

Swami Sivananda describes beautifully the state of serenity, “Serenity is calmness or coolness of mind. It is evenness of temper. Serenity does not come in a day or a week. It comes when you can control desires and cravings which forever produce restlessness. Serenity is like the surface of a still lake. Serenity is like a rock; waves of irritation may dash on it but cannot affect it.”

Serenity is the foundation of the other ITIES. We are all farmers, planting the seeds of ITIES in fertile ground so they will grow. Living the teaching of the following prayer gives serenity:

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

Serenity is being tranquil within. Serenity arises from a quiet mind that connects us with the deeper aspects of our consciousness. The quieter our mind, the deeper we can connect with our consciousness and come to our real self. This is yoga.

The calm elephant and the fly

A disciple and his teacher were walking through the forest. He asked his teacher, “Why do only a few people possess a calm mind?” The teacher replied, “An elephant was once picking leaves from a tree. A small fly came buzzing near his ear. The elephant waved it away with his long ears. The fly came again, and the elephant waved it away once more. This was repeated several times. Finally, the elephant asked the fly, “Why are you so restless and noisy? Why can’t you stay for a while in one place?” The fly answered, “I am attracted to whatever I see, hear or smell. My five senses, and everything that happens around me, pull me constantly in all directions and I cannot resist them. What is your secret? How can you stay so calm and still?” The elephant stopped eating and said, “My five senses do not rule my attention. I am in control of my attention, and I can direct it wherever I want. This helps me to get immersed in whatever I do, and therefore, my mind is focused and calm. Now while I am eating, I am completely immersed in eating.”

Upon hearing these words, the disciple’s eyes opened wide. He looked at his teacher and said, “I understand! My mind will be in constant unrest if my five senses and the world around me are distracting me. On the other hand, if I am in command of my five senses I can disregard sense impressions and my mind will become calm.”

“Yes, that’s right,” answered the teacher. “The mind is restless and goes where the attention is. Control your attention and you will control your mind.” The elephant gave a succinct definition of *pratyahara* and serenity: being master and not slave of the senses.

The SWAN principle

To create serenity, we need to restrain our violent emotions. This is the practice of *ahimsa*, non-violence, the first *yama* of Sage Patanjali. We make our thoughts, words and deeds less hurtful. We do not think hurtful or negative thoughts that will harm another person or the environment.

This we learn by practising the SWAN principle. SWAN is an acronym for strength, weakness, ambition and need. The SWAN principle or meditation allows us to understand and accept our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. We come to a point of self-acceptance. When working seriously with our SWAN, we come to the point where we can love ourselves for what we are. In spiritual life it is important to start with accepting and loving ourselves.

There are three aspects of ourselves: there is the self we think we are, the self we let other people think we are, and the real self which we are. It is the real self that we need to connect with. Through pratyahara and awareness we connect with our real self, we come closer to that true self which is serene within. Swami Niranjanananda explains, "Serenity arises when we can let go of our internal mental and emotional reactions. When we are serene, we are at peace with ourselves. Serenity is the experience of an integrated personality. However, most of us do not have an integrated personality, and therefore we are not serene. We identify with a false idea of ourselves."

Camel train

There is a story about a camel caravan which Swami Satyananda has told many times. It illustrates how the conditioning of the mind can block our ability to remain serene. Once upon a time, there was a caravan of three or four hundred camels going through the desert. One night, when the entire caravan was settling down to sleep, the camels were being tied to their hitching pin, but it was found that one hitching pin was missing. The camel drivers began to worry that there would be one camel they would not be able to tie up and it would run off in the night. In the middle of nowhere, every camel is valuable.

An elder suggested that they go through the same motion of hitching the camel, without actually tying the rope. When they did this, the camel sat down quietly and everybody went to sleep. The next day everyone got up, packed up the

camels and was ready to move. However, the camel without a hitching pin would not move. This was a big dilemma as the sun was rising high in the sky and it was getting hot.

Ultimately, the elder came to the rescue again. He told the drivers to go through the motions of untying the camel just as they did when they tied it. As soon as this was done the camel got up and started to move. Although the camel was never tied down it believed it was.

We are like that. We hold on to conditioning in the mind from past experiences that binds us to react in a certain way, it does not allow us to be open to the truth of the present moment. When we become aware of these conditionings we free ourselves from them and can remain serene. Sri Swamiji expressed the same idea of imagined bondage and real freedom in his poems, especially the one called:

Declaration of Freedom

*Whatever may seem to bind or limit you,
Declare yourself free from it now.
There is nothing in the outer world,
No person, no condition, no circumstance
That can take away the freedom
Which is yours in spirit.
Instead of wishing that you were free
To live your life differently,
Accept the truth that right now
You are free.*

*Free to change your thinking
Free to change your outlook on life
Free to be all that you long to be.*

*Make this a day of freedom,
Spiritual freedom.
Declare yourself free from anxiety and fear
Free from any belief in luck or limitation.*

Serenity in the rain

Here is a real life example of serenity from the 1993 World Yoga Convention held in Munger. Everything was set up, there was a magnificent marquee, a pandal, and on one of the days, when the lectures were going on, the rains came and it poured. The rain broke right through the pandal, drenched all the participants and started to flood the whole area. What did Swami Niranjan do? He gave an example of serenity: there was no panic, there was no rushing around; he immediately stood up and started to sing *Om Namah Shivaya*. The people who were wet and becoming flustered about the rain forgot everything. They forgot that they were completely drenched and everyone started to sing *Om Namah Shivaya*. Swami Niranjan led the whole congregation and everyone followed. We became serene at that moment because Swamiji transmitted his serenity to us. Until today people remember this moment for it was a highlight of the convention.

Be tranquil within, let that inner peace and joy radiate through a serene countenance. A serene countenance is peaceful, smiling and serious, and does not show any violent emotions. A serene mind is a valuable spiritual asset, and for this the world is a wonderful training ground.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Internal karma yoga is a philosophy and external karma yoga is the manifestation of that philosophy. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that the purpose of work is to disown its result. When you disown the result your mind is serene.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

As we disassociate ourselves more and more from results and expectations from our work and other selfish attitudes, we identify more with our creative nature, with peace within and we attain serenity.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Serenity and Stage 1 of pratyahara

Swami Niranjan stresses the point that serenity comes from the ability to let go of mental and emotional reactions. We have to observe what we react to, through which sense we are reacting. Are we reacting to something someone said to us and it is coming through the ears? Or are we reacting because we had an expectation about the food and the taste on the tongue is different from what we wanted? Or are we reacting due to something we saw? Each one of us needs to discover which sense we react to the most, and the expectations we had. This is putting awareness into practice. Awareness and pratyahara are not simply techniques we learn in the classroom, but techniques that we practise twenty-four hours a day. Stage 1 of pratyahara is becoming aware of what is happening externally and how we react internally upon receiving information through the senses: touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing.

The ITIES are a sadhana and one of the prerequisites of sadhana is to always be happy about it. We have to be happy about practising serenity. Whether we succeed or not, we have to be happy in the effort that we are making.

Pratyahara practice

Close your eyes and take a steady comfortable position. Become aware of your environment, where you are sitting. Become aware of the people around you and be aware of the positive vibration and feeling in the environment. Ensure that you are comfortable and relaxed.

Become aware of your breathing, the natural spontaneous breath, the natural spontaneous breathing. Become aware of every inhalation and every exhalation, in and out in a constant rhythmic movement. Do not allow one breath to pass without your awareness of it. Slowly encourage your breathing to become longer and deeper, so that each inhalation and each exhalation is as slow and deep as you can comfortably make it without strain. If you are familiar with ujjayi pranayama, adjust your

breathing to ujjayi, if not, continue with your natural rhythm, just encouraging it to become slower and deeper.

Then with your next inhalation, lift your awareness to the space within the chest, the cavity within the chest, known as *hridayakasha*, the space of the heart. Now visualize there a small candle flame. Around the flame is a glow of golden light and as you inhale the glow around the flame expands, and as you exhale the glow around the flame diminishes. Synchronize the expansion and the diminishing of the golden glow around the flame with your inhalations and exhalations. Visualize the imploding and exploding of light filling the whole chest cavity with the golden glow, coming from this small flame. Inhale and the light expands, exhale and the light contracts.

Gradually let the image of the flame and the glow fade into the background of *hridayakasha*. Become aware of any recent interactions that have taken place, today or over the past few days. Observe any recent interactions, pleasant or unpleasant. The idea is not to judge the mind, but to come to know it, to observe what is taking place there. Observe the different experiences you have had today and the different interactions you have had with people today, yesterday, the day before. Become aware of recent interactions, not reactions from long ago, but recent interactions and your reaction to them.

Observe through which sense organ the impression came. Something happened externally, you received it through the ears and you reacted. You received it through the taste buds and you reacted. You received it through the nostrils and you reacted. You received it through touch and you reacted. You received it through sight. Check any one of the five senses. Connect the outer experience with the sense organ through which the experience was transmitted into the mind, and become aware of your internal reaction, pleasant or unpleasant.

Simply be the witness, identify with that inside you which is able to observe your internal reactions and responses to external stimuli.

Become aware of interactions which came through a particular sense, which created a certain reaction or response, which enabled you to be serene. Have you been feeling serenity? What does serenity mean to you?

Bring into your awareness now a reaction which was of a more difficult nature, perhaps a negative reaction, or perhaps you were irritated or upset about something. Connect it with whichever sense instigated that reaction. Was it something you heard through the ears to which you reacted negatively or in an inappropriate way, and you lost your serenity, your calmness, your tranquillity? It is easy to keep serene when everything is going well; however, life is not like that. It has its ups and downs. When things don't go the way you want them to, are you able to maintain serenity?

Recall the incident in which you lost your serenity and relive that incident. Imagine it and visualize it in your mind. Imagine that if it occurred again you would handle it differently; you would maintain serenity, calmness, be unruffled and find an appropriate way of responding to the situation. Imagine the same incident lived with serenity.

Continue being aware of recent interactions and their connection through the sense organs of your experience, without judgement, without condemnation, simply impartial awareness. Awareness is impartial. It simply witnesses. Be aware of recent interactions that you have had with people and the responses, the reactions that have taken place in your mind. Be aware through which sense organ that response or reaction took place. This is Stage 1 of pratyahara.

Then relax your efforts. Relax your efforts and again take your awareness into hridayakasha and visualize that light imploding and exploding with the glow

around it in the background. Allow all your worries and reactions to dissolve and disintegrate into that light.

Then return your awareness to your breathing. Become aware of each inhalation and exhalation. Gradually return your awareness to the environment, the people around you, all of us farmers planting positive seeds in the mind. When you are ready, relax your positions and slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Stage 2 of Pratyahara and Non-irritability

15th April 2013

Stage 1 of pratyahara is becoming aware of the sense organ through which we are receiving an impression from the outside world and then of the inner reaction it is creating. As our awareness deepens we learn to maintain equilibrium externally, while undergoing reactions.

Stage 2 of pratyahara

Stage 2 of pratyahara implies that our awareness has deepened. We add the element of maintaining equilibrium externally. This means that no matter what happens, we become aware of the impression received through the senses, and no matter how irritated or upset we are feeling inside, we try to maintain external equilibrium. We learn not to express our feelings and reactions.

Of course, there are times when we want to express ourselves. Awareness gives us the choice to express what we are feeling or thinking, but it also gives us the choice not to. In this stage of pratyahara we are practising external equilibrium and non-reaction. The reaction is inside, as we are not yet able to control the internal reaction. However, we can control the facial expression, expression in the eyes and our body language.

Control does not mean suppression. As long as we are aware of what we are doing, there is no suppression. We are aware of what we are feeling and make a conscious choice

not to show the internal reaction, awareness is our safety valve here.

To apply the principles of Stage 2 of pratyahara to each ITY is helpful. To learn how to do this, we will look at non-irritability because irritability is so often experienced and we can vividly see the benefit of Stage 2 of pratyahara in cultivating non-irritability.

Still do not break the logical sequence of the ITIES when practising each one for a month. You will understand the sequence of the ITIEs and how one leads to the next one.

NON-IRRITABILITY

Synonyms

agreeability	joy
calmness	peace
contentment	pleasantness
enjoyment	not being easily annoyed
good nature	being patient
happiness	being tolerant

Antonyms

animosity	ill temper
annoyance	impatience
antagonism	indignation
displeasure	infuriation
enmity	getting miffed
exasperation	rage
fury	resentment
being in a huff	having a temper
ill humour	throwing a tantrum

If any of these negative feelings come into our mind, externally we keep a calm countenance. We are practising serenity and looking serene. We are able to maintain equilibrium externally.

Non-irritability is a continuation of fixity. When we are fixed on a goal, we mustn't be rigid and irritated when things do not go our way. Life has a way of not always going our way, and when that happens, we react in annoyance, animosity, antagonism, and regret it afterwards. In the moment we feel angry or irritable and as we cannot control it we express it, but later when we have calmed down, we regret our actions and words.

Ahimsa, non-violence, also plays an important role in non-irritability. It is the quality that Mahatma Gandhi practised all his life, and through *ahimsa*, he freed India from British rule. *Ahimsa* develops a non-reactionary state within us, a state free of irritation.

The tsar and the hawk

There is a story about a tsar of Russia and his favourite hawk. One day the tsar went out hunting. It was a long hunt and at the end he was exhausted and thirsty. He had his beloved hawk with him on his shoulder. He had a close and connected relationship with this hawk which he took on every hunting expedition. He came across a stream with just a dribble of water coming from it. He was so thirsty that he put his cup there and waited. Drip by drip the water entered the cup. Finally it was full, just as he was about to put it to his mouth, the hawk flew at the cup and spilt the water. The tsar was tired and ill-tempered, but he thought, "Well the hawk has been my friend all my life. I will fill my cup again and won't show my annoyance." Thereby, he practised Stage 2 of *pratyahara*.

He took the cup again, drip by drip, slowly the cup filled with water. Just as it was reaching the top, again the hawk flew at the cup and spilt the water. This time the tsar was very angry and shouted at the hawk. Again he put his cup down and drip by drip took the water. Just as it had filled for the third time, the hawk flew at the cup and all the water spilt. The tsar was so irritated, so angry, that he picked up his hawk, and threw it at a rock. The hawk collapsed and died.

Again the tsar took his cup and just as it was starting to fill, his servants came running and said, “Master, don’t drink that water, it has been poisoned. If you drink the water, it will kill you.” The tsar realized that his irritation had upset him to such an extent that he had killed his beloved bird that was protecting him. Often in the state of anger, we say and do things that later we regret.

The nail and the fence

In this story a father teaches his son a beautiful lesson about irritation, about controlling our irritation and the results that we have to face when we lose our temper. There was once a boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence. The first day the boy had driven thirty-seven nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered in daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered that it was easier to hold his temper than to drive nails into the fence. Finally, the day came when the boy didn’t lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that he now pull out one nail each day that he was able to hold his temper.

The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence and said, “You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. It won’t matter how many times you say, ‘I’m sorry’, the wound is still there. A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one.”

Why do we yell?

The power of words, or rather the significance of the volume in our speech, is made clear in the following story. One day, a sage asked his disciples, “Why do people yell at each other when they are upset?” The disciples thought for a while, and

one said, “We lose our calm and so we yell!” The sage asked, “So explain to me, why do you yell when the other person is right next to you? Isn’t it possible to speak to him or her with a soft voice? Why do you yell at a person when you are angry?” The disciples gave some answers but none satisfied the sage.

In the end, the sage explained. “When two people are angry at each other, there is a distance which arises between their hearts. To cover that distance they must yell to be able to hear each other. The angrier they are, the louder they will have to yell to hear each other through that great distance.” Then the sage asked, “What happens when people are in love? They do not yell at each other but talk softly. Why? Their hearts are very close. The distance between them is small.” The sage continued, “What happens when their love grows even more? They do not speak, they only whisper. Their hearts come even closer with love. Finally, they need not even whisper, they just look at each other and that is all. That is how close people are when they love each other. Their hearts are like one.”

Saint Eknath

The ITIES are virtues while their opposites, like irritability, are a mental impurity. Anger, vanity, fickleness, pride and meanness are impurities, *mala*, of the mind which need to be weeded out. This story shows how hard it is to cleanse the mind of impurities, and therefore, how important it is to be aware of any traps that could lead us towards irritation. Swami Satyananda says, “It takes a long time to purify the mind, but success is sure if the endeavour is earnest. You have to aspire fervently, be on the alert, watch your mind carefully, check for surging emotions and bubbling thoughts. Do not allow the current of bad thoughts and negative ideas to pass through the mind.”

Saint Eknath lived in a village in Maharashtra. He was particularly famous in his village for his patience and nobody ever saw him angry. A few vagabonds used to regularly meet

there to gamble. One day one of them began to praise Saint Eknath's virtues, "Sri Eknath never loses his temper under any circumstance. Isn't this trait remarkable?" Another, called Rama, challenged, "I shall make Saint Eknath lose his temper and prove that he is no different from others."

The next morning, Saint Eknath went to bathe in the Holy Godavari river. Rama stood waiting for Saint Eknath on a rooftop with a mouthful of paan. The moment he saw Saint Eknath emerge from the river, he spat paan at him. Without losing his composure, Saint Eknath walked back to the river for a holy dip. The defiler was surprised, but when Saint Eknath returned from his second dip, he again spat at the great saint. Saint Eknath again went back to the river for a dip without losing his calm, but the vagabond was persistent in his efforts to anger the saint, and he kept on spitting at him the whole day.

As twilight began to gather over the glittering waters of the Godavari, the vagabond got tired of spitting at Saint Eknath. He was bewildered by Saint Eknath's patience and forbearance. While his mouth was aching with the repeated spitting, Saint Eknath was as composed and fresh as he had been when he came to the river that morning! Feeling guilty and ashamed, Rama rushed down and fell at the feet of Saint Eknath. The saint blessed him. He asked, "Swamiji, how is it possible for you to be like this?" Saint Eknath replied, "I am on the way to offer my morning worship to my Lord. The dirt on my body can be easily cleansed by a dip in the river, but if I let irritability and anger enter my mind, it defiles the mind, and no amount of bathing in any river can cleanse me of this impurity."

Non-irritability implies not losing one's patience and being confident. There is joy, peace and an understanding that whatever comes is coming for a purpose. It has divine purpose and nothing could have stopped it. Whatever happens to us is our karma – it is destined and has to be. The choice we have is how we handle the present moment. Fortunately, we have the gift of awareness which gives

distance and non-attachment. When we connect with the witness and observe what is going on in our mind and around us we have the opportunity, in just a split second, to make the right and appropriate choice and not let our ill temper, bad mood or irritability show.

Discipline

Swami Niranjan gave a personal discipline for the ashram, for residents and visitors: “Don’t react. Pause. Then act.” In other words, whenever anything happens to you, instead of reacting you pause, observe your reaction, and choose how to act. This means you act authentically, otherwise we are mere reactions following reactions. The only way to avoid a chain of reactions is to practise awareness, to witness the reaction and choose a course of action. Swami Niranjan said the ashram discipline is to develop optimism, positivity, creativity and spirituality in everything you do. When you can do that you are ready to leave the ashram, but until you are able to maintain positivity, optimism and creativity and spiritualize every moment, you still need the ashram discipline.

The shadow

When something irritates us and causes a reaction, it is often an indication of an issue that we have not resolved in ourselves. This is called the shadow. The shadow is the part of ourselves we carry but have denied. When we were told by our parents or at school that we were naughty, bad, wrong or stupid, and something was forbidden, unholy or unacceptable, we put it into the shadow. We deny anything that shames us, and therefore it goes into the subconscious mind.

The more we have felt ashamed, the longer the shadow and the more rigid our masks. The shadow masks our true self. We put on a persona, a pretence or mask, and are not ourselves anymore. We are ashamed of what we are and have hidden it. It was not explained to us as children in the correct way, so that we would feel comfortable with

being naughty or doing something wrong. We have to make mistakes to learn, we can't always do the right thing, and it is a part of growing up. Therefore, whatever has not been resolved is caught in the shadow and prevents our creativity as we grow older. It prevents us from being and expressing our self, and obscures our capacity for joy, peace, wisdom, creativity and happiness.

Unfortunately, this shadow that we hold inside us comes out and presents itself in strange ways. Swami Niranjan said that we might appear to be good, nice and kind, but if deep inside we have unresolved issues, then at the time of crisis, this shadow tends to come out suddenly. It can create illnesses, impulsive behaviour or sudden lapses in character. It comes out in myths, legends and symbols.

The shadow is powerful, and if we do not recover the power contained in it, it begins to work against us. The suppressed expressions of courage, impulsiveness, freedom, shame, guilt, sexuality, fear, anger, and so on, are dangerous when left in the shadow. We project them onto others. Our outer emotional life becomes numb due to the mask of niceties and compromise that we impose upon ourselves. When we work with the techniques of pratyahara and meditation, we bring these hidden parts of ourselves to the surface. We see them little by little, accept them, integrate them into our life and finally overcome them.

When something irritates or annoys us in another person, generally it is something which we have or had in ourselves. Maybe traces of it are still in the mind. Therefore, when we are annoyed or upset with someone, we should look at ourselves. What is annoying us or what we are criticizing in another is likely to be something that we are harbouring in our own mind. If something irritates, angers or upsets us, we try to see how it connects with us. Do we have that characteristic somewhere in us? Is it hidden? Is it something we have recognized or denied?

The fact that we are irritated and upset indicates that there is something in the mind. Otherwise it would just pass:

go in one ear and out the other. We wouldn't even remember it the next moment. The fact that we do react and that we do harbour some type of resentment, anger or irritation is an indication that somewhere we need to do some internal cleaning.

Irritability is the precursor of violent outbursts of anger. Watch carefully for the disturbance in the mental equilibrium. Watch for the ripples of anger that might rise in the lake of the mind. Quell them then and there; do not allow them to assume greater proportions. Then you will attain peace.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

A positive thought always overcomes a negative one. This is the natural law. When the sun rises, fog vanishes. When the light is switched on, darkness vanishes. If you cultivate divine virtuous qualities, the evil qualities will disappear. Courage gets rid of fear, patience overcomes anger and irritability, love overcomes hatred, and purity overcomes passion. Be softer than a blade of grass, more patient than a tree, and more tolerant than the earth.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Non-irritability means not to be annoyed or irritated, but to cultivate patience and tolerance, not just with others but with ourselves, too.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Pratipaksha bhavana

The three masters are referring to an important technique found in the system of yoga, called *pratipaksha bhavana*, the method of substituting the opposite thought or emotion through imagination. It is the traditional way of replacing a negative thought or emotion with a positive one. For example, if we find we are irritable we immediately superimpose and visualize how it is to be non-irritable. If we are feeling afraid,

immediately we recall courage, as we think of courageous deeds we have done or courageous people we have heard about. Immediately we imagine and visualize courage and then superimpose it over the negative thought or emotion of fear. Little by little, with practice, the mind is programmed. When fear comes, then courage will come. When irritability arises we cultivate patience.

The other practice that is useful when working with non-irritability is the meditation practice of *antar darshan*, vision of the inner self.

Practice of antar darshan

Please take a steady and comfortable position. If you prefer to lie down, you may lie down. Otherwise, take a steady and comfortable position with your spine erect, hands gently resting on the knees in chin or jnana mudra. Eyes gently closed, shoulders relaxed.

Externalize your awareness by becoming aware of the sounds around you in the room or outside the room, and remember that you are using the ears as an instrument to hear the sounds.

Next, you are using the sense organs of touch to feel the cool breeze, to feel the clothes on the body.

Now, you use the nose to pick up any aroma or scent or smell.

Next, you use the taste buds in the mouth to pick up any sense of taste.

Now just become aware of the sounds around you and the environment which you are in. Make the effort to identify with the witness inside you. You are not the mind, you are not the body, you are not the senses; you are the *drashta*, the one who witnesses. You are impartial, changeless, pure intelligence, pure love, pure wisdom, the consciousness within you.

Operating from that point, become aware of the other people in the room, people similar to yourself, searching for equanimity, peace of mind, prosperity, truth and love.

Become aware of the environment, the sense of peace in the room. Ensure that your body is in a steady and comfortable position, so that you don't need to move for the next ten minutes or so.

Now move your awareness to your natural and spontaneous breath. Become aware of how and where you are breathing. Are you breathing through the nose, or the mouth? Is your breathing fast or slow? Do you have a regular rhythm or an irregular rhythm? Is your breathing deep or shallow?

Develop awareness of how and where you are breathing. When you are aware of the natural spontaneous breath, gently adjust your breathing so that it becomes longer and deeper. Encourage slow, deep breathing without strain, without force, but as slow and as deep as you can comfortably breathe.

If you are familiar with *ujjayi pranayama*, adjust your breathing to *ujjayi*. Otherwise continue with your natural breath; slow, deep breathing, in and out, in a constant rhythmic movement. With your next inhalation, bring your breath into the chest cavity, into *hridayakasha*, and visualize a small candle flame burning with a glow of golden light around it.

As you inhale, you imagine or visualize this golden glow expanding and filling the whole chest cavity. As you exhale, that golden glow diminishes. Inhale, and the glow expands in the chest cavity, exhale, and the glow diminishes.

Establish this rhythm, this practice, in synchronization with your breath, visualizing the golden glow exploding and imploding in *hridayakasha*.

Gradually allow the image of the flame and the glow to recede into the background and become aware of incidents during the day, yesterday or the day before. Through which sense organ did you react or respond to the external experience, interaction or event? Through which sense organ did you receive the information that went into the mind and created the response, the reaction?

This is Stage 1 of pratyahara. Allow your mind to drift among the different experiences and interactions you have had, not focusing on any particular one, until one becomes more predominant and creates a compulsion within you to focus on that.

When that happens, bring in Stage 2 of pratyahara, observing whether you were able to maintain external equilibrium at that time. You were aware of what was happening inside you, but at the same time you gave no indication of what was going on in your mind to the outside world. Not through the expression of your face, the tone of your voice, or the expression in your eyes. No one could possibly know what you were experiencing inside.

Were you able to maintain that external equilibrium? If not, imagine an incident, the same or another incident, when you lost your cool, reacted irrationally or irritably, with a lot of anger or disappointment.

Now return to Stage 1 of pratyahara. Become aware of that incident and re-imagine it, re-visualize it in your mind. Through which sense organ did the experience enter the mind?

Again practise Stage 2, visualize this experience a second time: when you are able to maintain external equilibrium, you do not show to the outside world what is going on, you do not reveal your reaction in any way. Through no expression on your face, or in your body language, can anyone determine what exactly is going on in your mind. Imagine it, visualize it and practise it on a mental level.

Start the programming on a mental level, so that when the situation arises again it is easier to apply, having already done it as a practice. These practices are to be learnt and then applied in daily life.

Now stop this practice and bring in a time when you became irritated. Become aware of the thoughts, the emotions and reactions that took place.

Simply observe; observe the negative state in the mind when you were very irritated, recall it, re-visualize it, re-imagine it.

Something happened, you lost your cool, you showed it and expressed it. What were the results?

Become aware of the fact that you need to change this negative pattern of reacting.

Become aware that it is a need within you. When you reinforce a negative reaction, irritability in this case, again and again and again, it sets up a deep program in the mind which becomes more and more difficult to break.

Accept the fact that you need to change the pattern of thinking and reacting. Realize that such reactions and emotions are disruptive to your peace of mind. They do more harm than good.

Understand that you can replace these negative reactions and attitudes with positive and more cheerful ones.

Working with irritability, imagine that same situation that you brought to mind, and how you would handle it with its opposite, with non-irritability. Put the ITY of non-irritability into practice. Imagine and visualize the whole scene where you were irritable inside, but this time you did not express it. You maintained equilibrium externally, so that no one understood how irritated you became from what was said or done to you, or what you saw, the incident or the circumstances that took place in your life.

Superimpose non-irritability. Strategically place it.

Imagine it, visualize it, live it on the mental plane. Whatever we imagine or visualize on the mental plane, it is just a matter of time before we can actually bring it down into our physical interactions with others.

Now relax your efforts and again become aware of your breathing, the regular, rhythmic inhalation and exhalation.

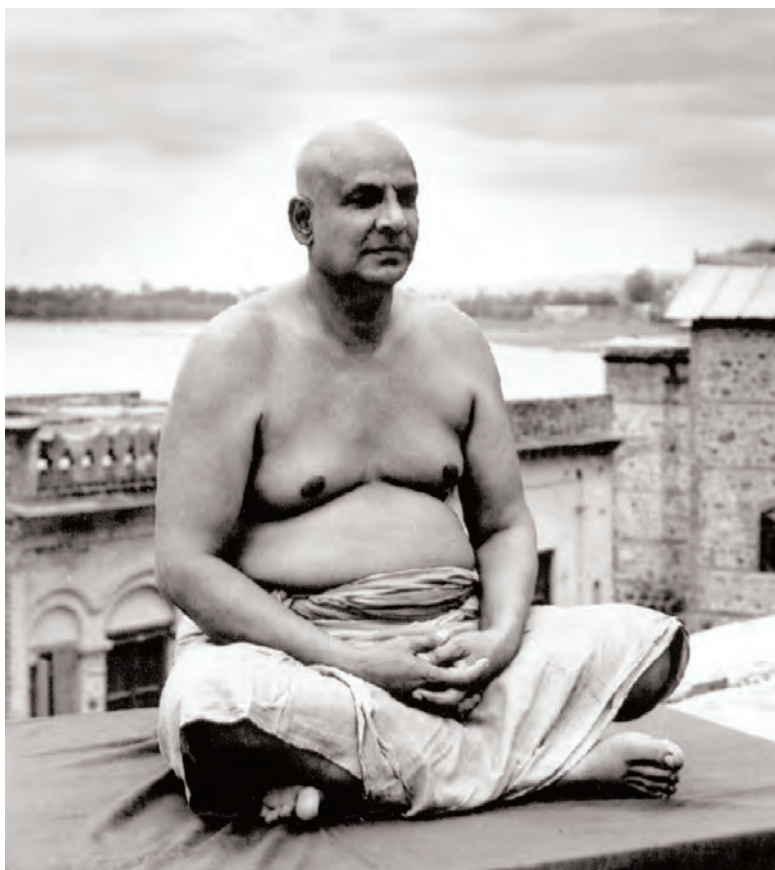
Be aware of the environment, the other people. Feel connected with the others. We are all doing the practice

together, and that practice connects us. Be aware of our interconnectedness.

Be aware of the room in which you are seated. Be aware of the sounds around you. Be aware of the feelings in your body.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes and relax your position. The practice of pratipaksha bhavana combined with Stages 1 to 3 of antar darshan is complete.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Regularity and Absence of Vanity

16th April 2013

REGULARITY

Synonyms

balance	predictability
evenness	proportion
to be like clockwork	punctuality
ordered	recurrence
consistency	rhythm
constancy	outline
harmony	steadiness
invariability	symmetry
orderliness	to conform to a routine
precision	

Antonyms

irregularity	inconsistency
change	instability
fluctuation	unsteadiness

The ITIES have a logical sequence, and through serenity, regularity arises. As we make the effort to maintain serenity, we also establish regularity. Regularity is being balanced and regular in one's daily routine, including, getting up, doing sadhana and taking meals at the same time everyday. It is performing physical and mental activities at the most

opportune times of the day, for example, taking into account the flow of the nadis. When pingala nadi is flowing an extroverted state of mind is created and when ida nadi is flowing an introverted state of mind is created. Regularity is being like clockwork in one's activities.

The benefits of regularity are many. It makes it much easier to enter pratyahara. Regularity develops willpower and leaves time for higher pursuits. When we are regular with our routine, we find that we have more time at hand. When we have irregularity in our routine, we are doing everything in a haphazard way and never seem to be able to fit anything into the day. It is said that when busy people add more and more to their routine, they become more organized and accomplish more in a day than they believed possible.

Ashram life enables us to apply regularity because in the ashram there is a fixed routine. Swami Niranjana sets the routine and the ashram works like clockwork around it. If he became irregular in his routine, all of us would not know which way to go.

Within the scheme of regularity, whether in an ashram, an office, a home or anywhere, we have to keep an open window for change. Change enters our lives at this particular time in history more than ever before. We are in the Age of Aquarius. Keywords for Aquarius are change and unpredictability. As long as we have a routine as a structure or foundation, we have the confidence and the stability to handle change when it occurs.

Swami Sivananda is inspired by nature and her regularity, "See how regular nature is. Mark how the seasons rotate regularly. Mark how the sun rises and sets, how the monsoon appears, how the flowers blossom, how the fruit and vegetables grow, how the revolution of the moon and the earth takes place, how the days and nights, weeks and months and years roll on. Regularity inspires confidence in oneself."

Time management

An important factor in regularity is time management. Rudyard Kipling says in his poem, 'If':

We have to make the most of every moment.

Every moment is precious; no time can be wasted.

In our busy lives, we have so many responsibilities, duties, commitments, so many roles to play and areas to allot time to. Therefore, we need to remember to allot time to ourselves. Allowing time for ourselves is important and helps to maintain regularity. In spite of the many things we have to do, we have to switch off every now and then and give ourselves some time.

Yoga capsules

The yoga capsule sadhana is especially designed for people who say they have no time. It makes it possible for everyone to make time to do sadhana, for we can stretch it throughout the day. In the yogic capsule for busy individuals, Swami Niranjan has given mantras to chant in the morning: the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times, the Gayatri mantra eleven times, followed by the 32-names of Durga chanted three times. He has also specified asanas to practise in the morning: tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana and surya namaskara.

In the mid-morning, we can do the pranayama, alternating between bhastrika and kapalbhati one day, bhramari and nadi shodhana the next. Swami Niranjan says it doesn't matter where we are. We can be in the office or in the bathroom. We can spend a bit longer in the bathroom and do a few pranayama practices. When we come out, people will see us refreshed, invigorated, with a lot more energy.

When we come back from the day's activities before we start the evening routine, we take a break of fifteen minutes to have a power-nap. A power-nap is a concentrated form of yoga nidra, it includes preparation, rotation of consciousness and breathing practices. This fifteen-minute break of

switching off gives us the energy and the power to continue with the evening activities.

Before we go to sleep, Swami Niranjan suggests a technique in which we review the day and observe how we handled situations and interactions. Did we handle them well? Was there something we could do better? If we find that we could have done something better, then we visualize that incident, we imagine it in exactly the way we would want it to be if the occasion arose again. The yogic capsule sadhana is an important tool to keep our yoga practices regular.

Planning

Apart from allotting time for ourselves and our yogic practice there are many other commitments such as, family, work, exercise, recreation, relaxation, friends, neighbours, pets and community seva. We will find that we have various categories in which to organize our time. We need to be regular in fulfilling these various duties, to feel satisfied with ourselves and to satisfy the other people concerned.

The first step in planning is to have a strategy, to plan how we will use our time. In the Greek ashram, we have developed the habit of planning in the evening what is to be done the next day. In the morning, we check the plan and add anything new. Of course, anything can change throughout the day, but as long as we have a plan settled it gives us a foundation, the security to move forward while still being prepared for change.

The second step is to monitor our plan. Am I achieving what I planned to do in the day? Did I put too much or too little in the plan?

In the third step, we analyze our plan and see if it worked. If it did work we look at the effective strategies we used and if it didn't work we think again.

Setting goals

Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjan emphasized the importance of having goals in life. These goals can be short-term, mid-term or long-term. A goal is something to

which we are directing our energy through the day, weeks or months, however, the goals need to be specific and realistic. We have to prioritize the 'to-do' list. Whether the projects are written down or kept in mind, we should list the priorities. First the urgent tasks must be taken care of, then we communicate and delegate tasks. Finally, we set down our routine.

Additionally, we have to be flexible, expect the unexpected and learn to adjust to change. We have to build flexibility into the plan. We establish a philosophy, a way of thinking, a point of view that enables us not to get into a panic when things don't go as planned. When everything is going as planned, we are in our comfort zone, but when events move out of the plan, we move in to the stretching zone. If we can't manage the stretching zone, we enter the panic zone. Once we are in the panic zone, we can't think clearly and everything just goes amok.

Prioritize

Once we have a 'to-do' list, we have to take the time to prioritize, including what needs to be completed today. The time of the day that we are at our physical and mental best is the best time to work on high priority tasks. We work towards eliminating urgent tasks, which gives us time to deal with the other tasks according to their priority. Another element in relation to regularity and prioritizing is patience. We have to wait patiently until it is the turn of the last items on the list to be dealt with. Sometimes we want to do what we like best, rather than what needs to be done first, however, this is going against the idea of setting priorities and leads to procrastination.

Procrastination

We have to conquer procrastination. There is a saying, "Never put off for tomorrow what can be done today." Swami Niranjan likes to quote a Hindi saying and encourages ashramites to follow it:

*What you want to do tomorrow, do today,
And what you want to do today, do now.*

There is a tendency for us to procrastinate. When we don't like doing something we think, "Oh, I'll do it later." We have to avoid this attitude and thereby free ourselves from worry. We also need to avoid being a perfectionist, paying unnecessary attention to detail, as it can be a form of procrastination. We need to focus on our goals and learn to say 'no' to unimportant things.

Saying 'no' threatens people and makes them feel guilty. Guilt is a force that hampers our spontaneous and creative expression and stands in the way of practising regularity. There are nine expressions of unhealthy guilt:

1. *Being overcommitted*: Overloading ourselves with more work than we can accomplish.
2. *Not being able to say 'no'*: When we say 'no' we feel guilty as we fear being rejected, feeling unloved or getting into trouble.
3. *Always excusing and apologizing for ourselves*: Feeling that we need to make excuses, apologize and explain everything in detail for we feel we are being judged, criticized or blamed. There is the old maxim: 'He who excuses, accuses'.
4. *Always blaming ourselves*: Blaming ourselves when things go wrong or constantly criticizing ourselves. Even when we were not involved we take on self-criticism and blame. It is the attitude that 'everything is my fault', which only reinforces helplessness as an identity.
5. *Worrying about what others think of us*: When receiving negative feedback we take it to heart and feel we are a failure. However, negative feedback on one particular incident in life does not make us a failure. We have to work on avoiding this response, otherwise we grant others the power to determine our self-worth.
6. *Not taking assistance or asking for help*: Doing our work without asking for assistance. Many people find it easier to give than receive. For example, when someone goes

to a lift with both hands full of luggage, and instead of asking someone, they put their nose on the button to press it. They don't feel comfortable asking for help.

7. *Not making time for ourselves*: Feeling there is never time for ourselves as we are always too busy working, helping, saving the world and worrying about things. We put ourselves as the last priority on the list.
8. *Being a doormat*: The feeling of being a doormat happens when we try too hard to be good and do twice as much as others. This attitude and behaviour builds resentment and blocks us. For example, when someone has a job to do and we jump in to do it before they have a chance to do it. This leads to resentment and anger, as the other person is quite capable. They may be doing it slower than we would like, but they need to have the chance to do it and to learn.
9. *Being a compulsive helper*: Feeling that it is our responsibility to fix everyone's problems, which is simply not possible.

Implementation and celebrating success

Knowing something and doing something are two different steps. A few years back in Japan, a study was done with executives. They were called into a meeting and asked various questions. It was clear that the executives knew what they had to do, but there was a problem which was summed up in one word: implementation. Although we know what to do, we don't implement it.

When we put time management into practice it encourages and assists us in our regularity. At first it may seem that we are getting less done than before as planning and monitoring are time-consuming, however in the long run it is saving time.

Punctuality

Swami Sivananda says that regularity and punctuality go hand in hand and that no one can expect success in life without

these qualifications. Swami Niranjan's regularity shows in his punctuality. He is always the first one to be at any program. Sri Swamiji was the same. In the programs we used to attend in Rikhia, he used to come a quarter of an hour early, the next day half an hour early, the next day he could have been an hour early and the program would actually start ahead of time.

Be regular in your daily habits, in your work and spiritual practices. Get up at a particular time. Be clock-like in your daily activities. You will be free from worry, fear, anxiety, haphazard and shabby work. You will do the right thing at the right moment.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

In the scheme of spiritual life, the amount of practice is not as important as the regularity of the practice. As long as you are regular in your yoga practices, even if you only devote a minimum period of time to them, you will definitely travel far into your inner self.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Regularity indicates a positive and stable mind. When the mind is unstable we are irregular. When the mind is left alone to behave like a monkey, irregularity sets in, but when the mind is encouraged to become stable and fixed, regularity comes about.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

ABSENCE OF VANITY

Synonyms

modesty	unpretentious
humility	chaste
meekness	virtuous
retiring	pure
unassuming	decent
unostentatious	demure
unobtrusive	

Antonyms

arrogance	being cocky
big-headedness	conceited
conceitedness	ostentatious
ego tripping	proud
narcissism	self-important
pretention	stuck up
showing off	having a swollen head
haughtiness	being empty

Through regularity we come to absence of vanity which may arise due to the success we have achieved in the previous ITIES, serenity and regularity. This success can go to our head, make us vain and feel self-important. The Latin root for the word for vanity is empty. Therefore, vanity is like an empty circle leading to nothingness or a dead-end path.

The arrogant tree

In a clearing, deep in the forest, the trees were having a pre-dawn discussion. "Animals come and rest in our shade, but they leave a mess behind. The smell on some days is unbearable!" said the Jamun. "They show no concern for us because we are silent, but I've had enough! I have made up my mind to drive away any animal that comes here!" said the Birch.

The Peepul, the oldest and biggest tree, replied, "That may not be a wise thing to do. The animals are a nuisance, I agree, but they serve a useful purpose. We are all inter-dependent – trees, animals, men . . ." "I'm sorry," interrupted the Birch. "I have great respect for your views, but in this matter I will not listen to anyone. I won't allow animals here any more!"

True to his word when a leopard came to rest in the shade later that day, the Birch began to shake violently from side to side. The leopard, frightened out of his wits, jumped up and ran. The Birch drove away all the animals that came to the clearing that day and the days that followed. In the course of time, animals stopped coming to that part of the forest. The Birch became a great hero to the younger trees in the neighbourhood and even some of the older ones began bowing to him when the Peepul was not looking.

Then one day, two woodcutters came to the clearing. "Men!" gasped the Birch. "Why have they come here? They have never come here before." "If they've never come here before it was because they were afraid of the animals," said the Peepul. "Now the absence of the leopard and the tiger has made them bold."

The Birch began to tremble with fear and with good reason for it was the first tree the woodcutters chopped down.

The foolish Brahmins

Once four Brahmins went all over India and amassed every kind of knowledge. They could not wait to discuss their skills with each other. They met in a forest, and one of them found a bone. It happened to be a tiger's thigh bone. The Brahmin who found it said, "I can create the whole skeleton of this animal," and he did so. The second Brahmin said, "I can give it skin, flesh, and blood," and so he did. There in front of them stood a lifelike tiger, with stripes and all. The third Brahmin said, "You know what I can do? I know how to give it life."

The fourth Brahmin, who was not half as learned as the others, said, "Wait, wait, don't give it life. We believe you."

However, the third Brahmin said, “What is the use of having the power to do something and not doing it? I have never been able to exercise this art of mine. I am going to give life to this thing. Just watch.” The fourth Brahmin said, “If you insist. Please wait till I climb this tree,” and quickly he scampered up the nearest tree.

The third Brahmin, with his mantras and magic skill, breathed life into the tiger. As soon as it came to life, it was hungry and looked around for something to eat. It pounced on the three Brahmins, who stood there huddled in terror unable to run away. It killed them all and devoured them at leisure, leaving only their bones on the forest floor.

Therefore, the moral of the story is: do not be vain and do not show off your knowledge or skills, only use them well.

Vanity is being overly concerned with ourselves, our appearance, what people say or think about us. We are trying to create an impression and take things personally. In ashram life we learn not to take things personally, if we did we would be distraught most of the time. We allow things to go in one ear and out the other and not hang onto them.

Vanity is not expressing our true self but trying to be someone else. We are not authentic. We are afraid that others may not like or accept aspects of ourselves, therefore we keep certain parts hidden. Swami Niranjanananda says, “We are always trying to create an impression. We are rarely our true natural selves. We express vanity in both the simplest as well as the most complicated ways. The question is how to be natural?” He likes to tell the following story to illustrate this point.

Mulla Nasruddin

One day, the Mulla was walking in a fairground with a group of his disciples and came across an archery contest. One of his disciples said to him, “Oh, Mulla, please enter the archery contest.” Mulla Nasruddin agreed and thought, “This is easy. I won’t bother doing any planning or preparation for this’. He picked up the bow, picked up the arrow and shot the arrow. It missed and went way off the mark.

The disciples felt a little bit awkward and embarrassed for their guru. Then that same disciple said, “Mulla Nasruddin, you never do anything without a purpose. There is always a reason behind what you do. Why did you do that?” The Mulla mentally blessed the disciple for saving the situation and giving him an opportunity to answer; he said, “That was an example of an over-confident person.” The disciple said, “Well, will you try again? Will you make another shot?” The Mulla said, “Yes,” and he was thinking, “Well, this time I have to be very careful.” So he measured the distance between where he was standing and where the target was, he checked the arrow to see that all the feathers were in the right position, he strung the bow a few times to make sure the spring was right and checked the velocity of the wind. When he felt he had it all in perfect control, he very slowly drew the bow, placed the arrow and fired, but the arrow just went ‘plop’, and fell down nowhere near the mark.

Again, that good disciple came up and said, “Mulla, you never do anything without a purpose, so what was the reason for missing the mark, how did that happen?” Again the Mulla blessed a thousand times the disciple for coming to his rescue, and said, “That was an example of an under-confident person.” The disciple asked, “Well Mulla, are you going to show us how you can hit the mark?” The Mulla picked up the bow, picked up the arrow, shot it and it hit the mark. Mulla Nasruddin walked away happily with his prize. As he was walking away, the people realized that he didn’t say who had shot the last arrow. So the disciple asked. “Mulla, you haven’t told us, who was it that shot the third arrow?” Mulla said, “That was me.” Once he was his natural self everything was taken care of.

Vanity is created when we believe ‘I am the doer’, where there is identification with the ‘I’. In reality, we are not the doers, we are not the enjoyers. Someone else is moving through us. We are simply instruments. It takes time to adjust to and accept this attitude. We can understand it intellectually, but there is a big gap between understanding something and experiencing it. In the course of sannyasa

and spiritual life, surrender and realization comes and we feel that 'I am not the doer, everything is in His hands'. Success or failure are in His hands. It is my duty to simply do the task, to follow it through and leave the results to Him.

Forever a disciple

In Swami Niranjan's life, there is total absence of vanity. Swamiji treats all as his equals and with respect. I remember, in the early days of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna, in Rikhia, Swamiji was a guru in his own right, but he always maintained the attitude of a disciple with his guru, Sri Swamiji. At that time, he didn't even have a seat, there was no seat provided for him to sit on. So he used to sit where he could. There was one year when Sri Swamiji was in a little hut on a platform, there were a few steps leading up to the hut. Swamiji used to sit on a little narrow step for hours while the program was taking place. There was total absence of affectation and vanity, he was an example of true humility. It was very inspiring to watch.

Do not boast of your birth, position, qualifications and spiritual attainments. Praise others, see good in all, treat even the lowliest creatures as your equal and with respect.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Three things one should not speak about: how much money we have, our good birth and spiritual powers.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Can you be the natural you? If you can be the natural you, you have overcome your vanities. The moment you try to project yourself as either an over-confident or under-confident person, you submit yourself to vanities. Humility is the antidote to vanity. If you can become humble in all situations, you will overcome vanity.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Sincerity, Simplicity and Veracity

17th April 2013

SINCERITY

Synonyms

genuine	true
non devious	cordial
truthful and honest	earnest
friendliness	without pretence
sociability	whole-heartedness
not feigned or affected	

Antonyms

dishonesty	ill will
insincerity	indifference
untrustworthiness	manipulative

As a result of developing absence of vanity, we become less affected and more closely connected with our natural being. This increases sincerity within us. Sincerity is being straightforward and truthful in motive, thought, word and deed. For many of us our motive, thought, speech and actions are often inconsistent. Part of sincerity is harmonizing thought, word and deed, making them one and the same, as much as possible according to the time, place and circumstances. The only person that Swami Satyananda

had found, whose motives, thoughts, words and deeds were one and the same, was Swami Sivananda.

When we develop awareness, we see more clearly the motive, impulse or flash that comes before the thought. Working on aligning motive, thought, word and deed is practising sincerity.

Sincerity is related to *asteya*, honesty, the third yama of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. It is non-theft in thought, word and deed. Not stealing another's work or thoughts and presenting them as our own, as well as not stealing another's property.

Sincerity implies being non-manipulative, not using powers of persuasion to manipulate situations. If we have the ability, the quickness of mind, to manipulate circumstances to suit ourselves we should not use it when it is derogatory, harmful or not useful to others.

To give an example: in a group of women, one of them was celebrating her birthday. A guest brought a large box of delicious, expensive chocolates and presented them to the woman. The other women thought, 'How kind and sweet of her to bring chocolates on our hostess's birthday'. However, the woman's actual motive was not to make her friend happy but to fatten her up, so she would be less attractive. The real motive was envy and jealousy.

Swami Sivananda describes beautifully the value and expression of sincerity when he says that, "Sincerity is one of the most important qualifications on the spiritual path. In sincerity there is truthfulness and integrity. A sincere person is always consistent and is free from fear. The tongue and the heart work in unison. The words of the mouth are the thoughts of the mind. Whatever is promised is put into action. Sincerity is being in reality what one is in appearance. A sincere person feels for the troubles of others and tries their level best to alleviate suffering. He is soft-hearted and generous. Sincerity is a great, dynamic spiritual force. Sincerity is the basis of every virtue or positive quality. It is the face of the soul."

No need to justify

Sincerity is not justifying ourselves. There are times when we are required to justify our actions or words, but we need *viveka*, discrimination, to determine when to justify and when not to. Definitely, in communication with the guru, as the guru knows what is in your heart and mind, it is an absolute waste of time to justify yourself in his presence in order to try to make yourself look right, good or correct. He knows what went on behind the scenes. In my early training at the Bihar School of Yoga, Sri Swamiji was strict about non-justification. He would not allow us to justify our actions, make excuses for ourselves or blame the situation on someone else or the circumstances. We had to state clearly, “Yes, I did that,” without the ‘because this and this and this happened’.

However, sometimes when dealing with others who do not have this depth of awareness, we need to explain

Let your words agree with your thoughts. Let your actions agree with your words. Let there be harmony among your thoughts, words and actions.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

It is better to aspire for sincerity in word, thought and deed before aspiring for success in sadhana. Besides, there is only one secret of meeting the challenges of life. One has to be sincere and one has to be innocent.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Sincerity is an important sadhana and attitude to be cultivated. Ask yourself, “Am I sincere with myself?” This is not a superficial question. Sincerity requires purity and innocence of heart. It is an expression of the unconditional state of existence, Shiva, Self, or Consciousness.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

something to smooth over the situation: why it happened, why we did it, what was the cause of the delay. Therefore, discrimination is required in relation to non-justification.

The voice of conscience

Being sincere includes keeping promises. If we don't keep a promise, it creates conflict within the conscience. The conscience is always witnessing everything. In the story of Pinocchio, Jimmy Cricket is Pinocchio's conscience, who is aware of any insincere motives, words, actions or deeds. When we are insincere, sooner or later, that little conscience pricks us, giving that uncomfortable feeling that we haven't done something quite right. This is positive, for if we were without our conscience we wouldn't realize the mistake, the slip or inappropriate behaviour, and it wouldn't concern or worry us. The more it pricks us, the more we need to listen to it and follow its guidance. Otherwise we bypass the conscience by thinking, 'No, I won't think about it' and getting involved in another activity to take our mind off our insincerity. In the course of time, the little voice of conscience becomes dimmer and dimmer. It is important in the practice of sincerity to allow the conscience to do its work within us.

If we are sincere to others, we understand, believe and feel that people are sincere to us. If we trust ourselves, we can trust others. If we cannot trust ourselves, because we often do or say things we shouldn't, we naturally believe that everyone is like that. This is a natural conclusion, but it makes it difficult to trust others. First we need to trust ourselves by developing sincerity, then we can trust one another.

Public testimony

Swami Niranjan's thoughts, words and deeds are one and the same. What he thinks, he says and he does, according to time, place and circumstances. He is sincere with himself and others. Once on New Year's Eve, he said publicly that

on this particular day, he reflects on the year, to see where he hasn't managed to do what he wanted to, how he could have handled things better, and whether he was as selfless as he had aimed to be or if there was selfishness. These are things we also might think, privately, but he said them publicly, which at the time was moving and inspiring to hear. It showed to one and all just how sincere he is with himself.

SIMPLICITY

Synonyms

clarity	modesty
cleanliness	being frank
clearness	natural
directness	artless
purity	plain behaviour and actions

Antonyms

complexity	extravagance
complication	luxury
difficulty	showiness

Through sincerity simplicity arises. In the effort to be sincere with ourselves, we discover that we are carrying a lot of unnecessary rubbish. We have a lot to get rid of. If we are sincere and ask the question, "Am I sincere with myself?" we will see that we have a lot to offload. Simplicity includes simplifying our lifestyle. The more simply we live, the less we need. The less we need, the more simply we live. Simplicity is the absence of affectation, pretence and showiness. We become natural. It is not easy, as we have had so much social conditioning relating to the image of how we should be and behave in different situations. We try to be natural, childlike, innocent, artless, to learn to be less complicated and put into practice Swami Satyananda's saying, 'Simple living, high thinking'.

The simpler our lifestyle, the more effort we can put into practising the ITIES, doing our sadhana and improving ourselves. Simplifying our life has a powerful effect on the mind, it becomes free from the distractions of the senses and less cluttered. We become clearer, more relaxed and creative. The best approach is to constantly practise letting go of what we no longer need. Here are some examples of areas of our life that we can simplify:

Lifestyle: How can I simplify my diet, so it is not complicated or rich? So I eat food that my body needs, not only what I want, but what is necessary. In regard to weight, am I overweight or underweight? Simplicity means finding a way to lose excess weight.

Appearance: Being simple in dress and ornaments. We need to be aware of when our lifestyle does not require a fancy appearance, and then we offload.

Possessions: We have so many possessions. We can get rid of some. There are so many people who are in need. Every year in the ashram, at the beginning of the year, Sri Swamiji used to collect the objects that we had not used during the previous year in baskets. They were all distributed. We had to give to receive.

Wealth: Not storing too much money – we keep what we need and distribute the rest. We always have to keep in mind that everything is given to us in trust; it is not our personal possession. It is ours only to share.

Communication: Speak as simply as possible. Sri Swamiji's speech was so simple that a child could understand it. Of course, it takes someone with that vast knowledge and wisdom to be able to put such truths into a simple way. It is something for us to aspire for, to simplify speech, not to use long, unnecessary and intellectual words. We should speak to convey a message clearly and not to impress the other person.

Mind: There is a lot of unnecessary programming in the mind that we can do without. Through the Satyananda Yoga-Bihar Yoga pratyahara techniques, such as yoga nidra, antar

mouna and antar darshan, we can bring this unnecessary mental conditioning to the surface and slowly find ways to remove it, thereby making the mind lighter.

Information: We can remove the intake of useless information. We are living in an information age and are inundated with information. It is impossible to hold all this information. We need to see what is necessary and discard the unnecessary. We should not be caught up in information that doesn't concern us, or is not useful for assisting others.

Emotions: If you find there is an excess of emotional reaction in your responses to everyday situations, it is something to work on and offload. There are inappropriate emotions like holding onto grudges. It is a waste of time, there is no time to hold on to these things. Antar mouna is a wonderful technique for offloading and removing petty slights. It enables us to forgive, forget and get on with life.

Activities: We do a lot of unnecessary activities. We need to categorize them and see what is necessary for fulfilment, satisfaction and to feel good about ourselves. Then we discard what is not required. In this way, we add time and space into our daily schedule which we can use in a creative way. We need breathing space between the various activities. Sometimes the days are so full that we move from one activity to the next with no gap in between. There are days when we have to face this situation, be strong and have the stamina to handle it. We need to create space to relieve any feeling of being under pressure, either from ourselves or from others.

For Swami Sivananda simplicity is a powerful quality, "The greatest truths are the simplest; and so are the greatest people. A simple, frank person is the most agreeable person. Goodness and simplicity are indissolubly united. Simplicity is Nature's first step and the last of art. There is majesty in simplicity."

The rabbi and the miser

A rabbi was worried about having enough food to give the poor during an extremely desperate and hard time; many families needed help. He visited many people who lived in his village, asking them to donate money to help others. The rabbi decided to also visit the most miserly member of the village. This penny-pinching man, known for being tight-fisted and mean-spirited, was the richest man in the whole county. The rabbi's students thought the rabbi was crazy to waste his time, but they went with the rabbi on his visit.

The stingy man grudgingly opened the door and allowed them to come into the entryway. The rabbi explained why he had come. The man sighed. "I don't have anything to give. Isn't there anyone else you could ask?" "No, I have already asked all the people in the village," replied the rabbi. "We would appreciate anything you can spare." The miserly man sighed again but returned with his fist closed tightly over one small coin. The rabbi said, "Thank you so much! We so appreciate your giving. May you lead a blessed life for your generosity."

As soon as they walked outside, the students expressed their outrage. "Why did you give him a blessing for being so stingy? He could have easily donated enough money so that no one would have to be hungry and cold!" "Yes, indeed it would appear that way," the rabbi replied, "but he gave what he could give." "He hoards his money! He only believes that he is poor," they argued.

Several days passed and the rabbi went again to this stingy man's house. Again he asked for money. This time the man sighed and gave him a fistful of small coins. Once again, the rabbi thanked him and gave him his blessing. Each visit this tight-fisted man gave a little more. On the fourth visit, he brought a whole chest of coins to donate. He gave the rabbi a big hug and thanked him for allowing him to give what he didn't need anymore.

God's coffee

Another story shows us how we are caught up in the unnecessary, trivial objects of the world and thereby miss the essentials of life and life itself. A group of alumni, highly established in their careers, met one day to visit their old university professor. Conversation soon turned into complaints about stress at work and in their lives. The professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups – porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite – telling them to help themselves to the coffee.

When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said, “If you noticed, all the nice-looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. It is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, but actually this is the source of your problems and stress. Be assured that the cup itself adds no quality to the coffee. In most cases it is just more expensive, and in some cases even hides what we drink. What all of you really wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you went for the best cups and then started eyeing each other's cups.

Now consider this: life is the coffee; the jobs, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain life, and the type of cup we have does not define, nor change the quality of life we live. Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee God has provided us. God brews the coffee, not the cups. Enjoy your coffee!”

The happiest people don't have the best of everything. They just make the best of everything. Or as Swami Sivananda would say, “Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.”

Like a sannyasin

Swamiji's lifestyle is simplicity incarnate. When he had the choice to build a residence for himself, he chose a small, humble kutir where he could live. He didn't go for an

elaborate expansion of buildings where he could have a lot of space. No, he chose something simple and small. In fact, his room might be one of the smallest rooms in the ashram. He lives simply and travels light. He travels with one small suitcase, a couple of dhotis, maybe two kurtas, the barest necessities. He travels and lives as a sannyasin: simply and lightly.

Be artless. Be simple in your speech. Do not twist words and topics. Be plain. Avoid diplomacy, cunningness and crookedness. Be simple in your dress. Be simple in your food. Speak simply in short sentences.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

If everyone wished for poverty, the world would be heaven. Everybody is trying to be wealthy, but the great saints have said that one has to live a life of self-imposed poverty. Actually, the word poverty should be replaced by the word simplicity. Simplicity in life is living exactly in accordance with your necessities and means.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Simplicity is getting rid of the unnecessary and complicated pretences in life, and learning to become uncomplicated.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

VERACITY

Synonyms

accuracy	frankness
actuality	being genuine
authenticity	honest to God
candour	‘speaking the gospel truth’,
correctness	truthfulness
credibility	honesty
exactitude	honour
exactness	impartiality
sticking to the facts	integrity
fairness	openness
fidelity	precision.

Antonyms

erroneousness	inaccuracy
falsehood	

By simplifying our life, we come closer to our true self and veracity, adherence to truth, arises. We have the famous quote from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1:33), a father’s advice to his son:

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Veracity is adherence to truth. When we are truthful by nature, we stick to our promises. If we cannot stick to our promises we do not make them. If we promise something, we do it no matter what. If we feel that we may not manage it, it is better to say, “I will make the effort to get that done for you,” or “Yes, I will do my best.” If we don’t fulfil a promise, we come into conflict with our conscience.

Gandhi and the sugar

A woman once came to Mahatma Gandhi with her son and requested him to tell the boy to give up eating sugar. Gandhi

asked the woman to bring the boy back in a week. Exactly one week later the woman returned, and Gandhi said to the boy, "Please give up eating sugar." The woman thanked the Mahatma, and, as she turned to go, asked him why he had not said those words a week ago. Gandhi replied, "A week ago, I had not given up eating sugar."

Veracity also implies not exaggerating to create an impression, tell a good story or use it in an insincere way. We may be tempted to tell a good story for everyone to laugh, but it will not be sticking to veracity. Veracity means not twisting the facts, it is being accurate and precise, speaking sweet truths and not truth that hurts others. Swami Niranjan quotes a Sanskrit saying: *Satyam bruyat priyam bruyat, na bruyat satyamapriyam* which means, speak the truth which is pleasant and do not speak the unpleasant truth. He explains that although it is the truth, if it is unpleasant, it will create *himsa*, aggression or violence, and shock in the mind of the other person. Therefore, veracity is diplomatic communication.

Mataji

There is a story Sri Swamiji used to tell us about a young girl who was being chased by a group of boys who wished to cause her harm. She was running for her life through the village and came across a house where an old woman was tending the flowers in the garden. The girl said to the woman, "Please, I'm in danger. There are some boys out to harm me. Can you hide me somewhere?" The old woman quickly opened the door and hid the girl in her house. Just at that point, the bad guys came and saw the old woman. The leader of the gang said, "Hey there, Mataji, did you happen to see a young girl racing around here? We are looking for her. She is my sister and she wants to elope with a man the family doesn't agree with. We want to bring her home." The old woman, knowing the truth, said, "A young girl? I think I did see her, she went in that direction."

Of course, strictly speaking it was an untruth, however, veracity must be seen in regard to a higher truth, the truth

of morality where no harm or hurt is created. Veracity or speaking the truth has many levels and meanings. Ultimately, we have to be truthful to a higher aspect, a higher truth within us.

Discovering truth

A person who is truthful by nature lives veracity. A person who is genuinely free from pretence lives sincerity. That is the difference, but the qualities of sincerity and veracity complement one other. The truth has to be discovered by each one of us, according to our level of conscience. Swami Niranjan says, “Veracity is adherence to truth. What truth is has to be discovered by every individual for themselves.”

There is the story of four blind men trying to describe an elephant. One blind man was holding the elephant’s ears and said, “An elephant is like a fan.” Another was holding the tail of the elephant and said, “An elephant is like a broom.” Another was holding the leg of the elephant and said, “An elephant is like a column, or a trunk of a big tree,” and the fourth was holding the tusk and said, “An elephant is like a conch that you blow.” None of those blind men had an absolute picture of the truth, because they couldn’t see. If sight had been given to them that day they would see that they were holding on to a part of the truth, not the whole truth.

What is true for us may not be true for the next person. As long as we are true to our conscience, which dictates according to our level of awareness and evolution, we are being true to ourselves and we will have done our best. Truth keeps the conscience clean. Keeping the conscience clean naturally allows the mind to become quiet and free of disturbances. It is a state, a condition which helps the practice of pratyahara.

The king and the astrologer

Once there was a king who asked an astrologer what the future held for him. The astrologer looked at the king’s birth

chart and said, “Your family, your clan and your kingdom will be destroyed. You will die a lonely man.” The king became angry and gave the order to put the astrologer in jail. He called another astrologer, who read the chart and said, “My king, you have a long life. You will outlive your friends, family and sons; you will outlive your kingdom too.” The king was happy and showered him with gifts. Both had said the same thing. One said it bluntly, the other diplomatically.

Ashwatama

In the *Mahabharata* there is the story of Yudhishtira and Drona. Yudhishtira was the eldest brother of the Pandavas. Drona was the commander of the enemy army, the Kauravas. When the battle was taking place Yudhishtira was asked by Sri Krishna to lie to Drona by saying that Ashwatama was dead. Ashwatama was the beloved son of Drona. Sri Krishna and Yudhishtira understood that once Drona heard that his son was dead, he would despair and lose all hope. His life would not be worth living anymore. This was a terrific test for Yudhishtira, who never told a lie. He was the son

Be truthful. Stick to your promises. Do not exaggerate. Do not twist facts. Think twice before you speak. Speak truthfully. Speak sweetly. Be precise in what you say.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Check up on your statements and actions and as an accounts clerk tallies his daily expense sheet, find out how much truth you have invested in your conduct.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Truth is diplomacy. Not crooked or political diplomacy, but a diplomacy that arises out of knowing how our words can influence another person’s mind.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

of Dharma, the god of righteousness. To him the most important virtue was truthfulness.

So, when he went to tell Drona that Ashwatama was dead, he did it in a particular way. Ashwatama was the name of the son of Drona, but it was also the name of an elephant in the Kaurava army. Yudhishtira had killed the elephant. He went to Drona and said, "I have come to tell you that Ashwatama is dead," in a muffled voice he added "Ashwatama the elephant." Yudhishtira managed to tell the truth, more or less. Drona didn't hear 'the elephant' being whispered, he heard that Ashwatama was dead and collapsed. This was one of the turning points in the Mahabharata war.

The guru's task

Veracity implies that it is important to speak the truth which is pleasant, and not to speak the unpleasant truth; not to speak truth that hurts, wounds or shocks another. Swami Niranjan does this. When there is a need, however, he will speak the truth in no uncertain terms to a disciple who he is training. As a disciple it is definitely not always comfortable, but it is necessary. It is the ego that is standing between us and our guru. It is his task to refine our ego. So naturally, at times he has to be firm and speak the truth. Sometimes he tells the truth in a joke, sometimes in a story. Sometimes he may be talking to someone else, but he is moving the message across to us and is making sure that we understand, whereas the other person has no clue what is going on. He finds many ways to communicate the truth.

Swami Niranjan always speaks with a purpose, never for the sake of speaking. Swamiji does not engage in gossip, chatting or socializing. There is hidden wealth behind everything he says, even a short sentence. One time, he was leaving by car early in the morning, and I said to myself, "Shall I get up or shan't I get up, shall I get up or shan't I get up? Yes, I want to get up and see him off." So I went down to the car park. As the car was moving off he said just one

sentence to me. One sentence which was a truth that meant so much to me, that had so much depth.

As a guru, Swami Niranjan, speaks with purpose his words have great power, for when people speak and live the truth, their words and actions are potent. Ultimately, whatever they say comes true.



Equanimity and Fixity

18th April 2013

EQUANIMITY

Synonyms

peace	confident
a constant mind	coolness
balance of mind	detachment
even tempered	equability
level headed	patience
aplomb	equipoise
assurance	presence of mind
contentment	tranquillity
equilibrium	self-control
calmness	nonchalant
composure	unruffled

Antonyms

agitation	excitement
arousal	perturbed-ness
discomposure	being upset

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says (2:48):

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and being balanced in success and failure! Evenness of mind is called yoga.

Equanimity is being balanced, even in extreme situations. It is being even-tempered in heat and cold, success and failure, happiness and suffering. A balanced person is not influenced by the pairs of opposites. Having discovered ways to be true to ourselves and others, to respect ourselves and others, the mind quietyens and equanimity, *samatvam*, has a chance to flower.

According to Swami Sivananda, equanimity is the ability to remain cheerful in adverse conditions, to have fortitude in meeting dangers and to have a presence of mind and forbearance to bear insult, injury and persecution. Equanimity means being able to go through the routine of life amidst the din and clamour of the world, patiently and joyfully.

Following are examples of some pairs of opposites which pull us here and there and make us lose our balance in actions and experiences:

keep silent	talk
follow, receive orders	lead, give orders
defeat	victory
success	failure
praise	criticism
pleasure, joy	pain
profit	loss
like (<i>raga</i>)	dislike (<i>dvesha</i>)
caution	courage
lightning-like speed	circumspection
questioning	self-confident
receptivity	resistance to influence
accept	differentiate and reject

We need to learn to use each characteristic at the right time, at the right place and according to the circumstances. The same characteristic may be correct on one occasion and incorrect on another. Therefore, *viveka*, discrimination, is required.

To maintain equanimity we need to know when to keep silent and when to talk. There are times when we should say nothing, when we shouldn't answer back, where being silent

leaves the other person wondering what is going on in our mind, and this may be the best thing to do at a particular time. There are other times when it is important to talk and to communicate.

Once when in Finland, Paramahamsaji and I were invited to lunch. Previously there had always been a swami with him, to build a bridge, create conversation or throw in a subject which Swamiji would take up and talk about, but on this particular occasion the swami was missing. I was the only one there and silence reigned. I thought, "Shall I speak, shall I not speak, shall I speak, shall I not speak? What can I say? What can be useful to say?" I was almost paralyzed by the situation. Suddenly, I remembered that the evening before our hosts had taken us to have a Finnish sauna. So I opened my mouth and said, "Oh, Swamiji, the sauna we had . . ." "The sauna!" he said, and immediately started talking about the Finnish saunas, their benefits and how refreshed he had felt afterwards.

In that situation it was my duty to break the ice and avoid uncomfortable, awkward silence. There are many occasions when it is not necessary to speak, to let silence reign or allow someone else to start the conversation. Equanimity is understanding when to talk and when to be silent; when to follow and receive orders, and when to lead and give orders.

How to face defeat and victory with equanimity? We can have the understanding that if a task is given to us, we do our best, but the success or failure, the result, is not in our hands. In spiritual life and especially in sannyasa training, we learn to experience failure and success with equanimity. When I was a child, I used to play tennis and win the matches. My mother said to me one day, "Tomorrow when you play, lose the match and see how it feels." It was a difficult exercise. I hit the ball into the net or hit it over the far line to lose the match. The worst thing was that everyone came up to me afterwards and said, "You poor thing, you must be feeling so disappointed. You mustn't be feeling well

today. I am so sorry for you.” That sort of pity was far worse than actually failing the match, but it was an experience.

Balance in pleasure and pain

There is an incident in the life of Swami Sivananda which describes the attitude he had towards pleasure and pain. When Swami Sivananda was on an All-India tour, he was acclaimed, received praise and accolades. Everything was full of joy, the people were joyful. The tour worked out perfectly. Soon after his return to the ashram in Rishikesh, a disciple saw Swami Sivananda hitting himself with a stick, on the back, waist and legs. The disciple asked, “Swamiji, what are you doing?” He replied, “I am testing myself. After the joy I felt in the experience of receiving praise, giving the lectures and meeting people, I want to know whether I can take pain in the same way.” He was such a great master and guru that he set the example for his disciples of how to handle pain and pleasure with equanimity.

We need to keep equanimity in all circumstances. We need to know when to be cautious and when to be courageous, when to move with lightning speed and when to have circumspection. There are many pairs of opposites and when we are practising equanimity we need to learn to work with them, for ultimately, there is no right or wrong, but a way to remain balanced in a given situation and thereby create harmony within ourselves and around us.

Personality types

Equanimity is a state when our entire being is calm and quiet. It is a state of pratyahara. We are able to think, decide and face the challenge of dealing with different people with balance. Swami Niranjan says that in an ashram we deal with various personality types. There are many personalities and the person with equanimity knows how to differentiate between them. There are various models of personality types that can be helpful to understand others. Here is one such model:

The tyrant: This is a person who likes to control everything. He is opinionated, always right and tries to enforce his vision on others, regardless of the cost. He wants the power; he is the bully in the group.

The coward: The opposite of the tyrant is the coward. He never expresses an opinion, makes decisions, takes initiative, confronts anyone, debates anything or makes demands. This person needs support from the group to emerge from the self-made shell.

The fickle person: For this person nothing is important. The person doesn't listen, is shallow, forgetful and makes mistakes. We repeat something ten times, a hundred times and still it doesn't get through. One day in the ashram we were having a discussion and I said to Sri Swamiji, "Swamiji, you know, in Greece I have to repeat the same thing at least ten times." He said, "Come to India and you'll repeat it fifty times."

The indecisive person: This type of personality can't make decisions and is swayed by the first person that crosses their path. They constantly change their opinion. They are indecisive and don't have a clear picture of what they want.

The complainer/blamer: They truly have a chip on their shoulder and feel that the world owes them something. They are never to blame for anything. They point the finger at others, it is always someone else's fault. This person never has time, is always overburdened, never receives proper feedback and never gets the assistance they require. They feel that people don't listen to them. They put other people down and feel sorry for themselves most of the time.

There is a story of a person who stayed with us in the ashram. Her mother was the blaming and complaining type. She was complaining about everything, so her daughter had to work out many ways to handle challenging situations without losing her balance and without creating friction or conflict.

On one occasion, the mother wanted to prepare for her demise, so she said, "I want to buy a coffin. The right size,

right shape and made of the right wood. It has to have the cross in a particular orthodox way on the top.” The daughter said, “Okay mother, let’s get a coffin.” So they went to the coffin makers and brought the coffin back to the house. Then the mother couldn’t decide where to keep the coffin. So the daughter said, “Okay, the only place that is big enough is in the garden.” So they placed the coffin in the garden, but the mother said, “Oh no, I can’t keep it in the garden, what will the neighbours think?” So the daughter said, “Mother, I think the best place for the coffin is in the kitchen, then we can see it every day.” Faced with this type of repartee, which didn’t give in to her mother’s complaining, in the course of time her mother stopped complaining.

The angry person: This person is always angry about something, goes to bed angry, gets up angry, and has the attitude, “I’ll show them. I’ll get them. You think you can do this to me, no, I’ll get back at you.” He is the terror of the group.

The perfectionist: A person with this character dots every ‘i’, nothing is ever good enough for them, they are never satisfied, they waste time attending to unnecessary detail. They can’t see the wood for the trees.

The hypocrite: Another personality trait is to always try to please the other person. They are not sure which side is going to win so they switch from side to side, as the wind blows. They are loyal to no one, but will always choose the winning side and be quick to choose. Hypocrites are never true to themselves or others.

The question is how to maintain our equanimity when these people cross our path? Equanimity is being even-tempered in extreme situations and with the idiosyncrasies of people we live and work with.

Good luck, bad luck

There was a peasant living in a village who had a beautiful white stallion he was very fond of. One day the stallion ran

away. The villagers came to him and said, "Oh, what bad luck, your stallion ran away." The old peasant simply said, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?" The next day, the stallion returned with twelve wild horses. The neighbours from the village came to say, "What good luck! Now you have thirteen horses." The peasant said, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?" The next day, the peasant's son tried to break in one of the horses and broke his leg. So again, the neighbours came and said, "Oh what bad luck. Your son broke his leg while trying to tame a horse." The peasant just said, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"

After a few days, the regents of the emperor came and said that war had been declared in the country and they were conscripting all the young men. So of course, the peasant's son with the broken leg was not conscripted. The villagers were jealous and said to the peasant, "What good luck you have all the time; how do you manage it?" He said, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?" This is an example of maintaining equanimity.

Picasso

This is a true story of Picasso. Picasso was having an exhibition in Paris, feeling happy and proud of his paintings. He felt that he had given himself to his work. As he was walking around listening to different comments that people were making, he came across two women who were talking about one of his paintings. One woman said to the other, "Such a painting should not be allowed, it is obscene and not good for the younger generation. They shouldn't be allowed to see paintings like that." The other woman said, "Yes my dear, you are correct. Paintings like that should never be allowed. I don't know what sort of a mind the painter has. It is such an evil and corrupt mind. Look at that woman in the painting, getting undressed in the bedroom and the man who is peeping in through the open door, watching her undress."

Picasso couldn't contain himself anymore, so he tapped the woman on the shoulder and said calmly, "Madam, the

woman is not getting undressed; she is getting dressed. The man standing at the door is her husband. They have been married twenty-five years, and he is waiting to take her to the opera. The evil, madam, is not in the painting, but in the mind,” and he walked off. Picasso did not lose his equipoise; even if he did feel insulted, he did remain calm, but firmly said what he had to say.

Viveka and vairagya

The key to maintaining equanimity is viveka, discrimination or right understanding. It is knowledge with awareness that enables us to act correctly according to the time, place and circumstances. It enables us to make appropriate decisions and see behind the scenes. It is seeing the different shades of grey between black and white. Nothing is as it seems for there is always something going on behind the scenes. Often we see a situation superficially, whereas with viveka we can see what is actually happening. Viveka gives understanding, the meaning behind words, the subtext. Many times we are talking to people and they cannot express with words what they want to say. With viveka we are able to know what they are trying to say and communicate on this level.

Viveka is awareness of right and wrong, and of filtering the illusive from the real. This awareness can be applied to everything: to understand what is important and what is secondary, what is essential and what is a minor detail; to distinguish the true from the false; to be able to see the motive behind thoughts, words and actions.

Vairagya is another tool and attitude that helps in developing equanimity. *Vairagya* is dispassion, transcending attachment. Generally we are attached to those objects which give us pleasure, fulfilment, happiness and satisfaction. With vairagya one experiences everything, but remains free from the influence of it and the craving for it. One does what needs to be done, lives in the moment and remains free from any desire for repetition of an experience. As we develop

vairagya, we observe the experience of being attracted, but we slowly remove our mind from it. Through awareness and being the witness we manage to stay free from the attraction to objects, people, situations, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour patterns, to our conditioning and mental programs.

Shadsampatti

The sixfold virtues or *shadsampatti* are qualities which help us to maintain balance. The first one is *shama*, keeping the mind calm. Being cool and serene in provocative situations requires constant practice. For this the practices of pratyahara, pratipaksha bhavana and working with the yamas and niyamas, are helpful. Then there is *dama*, restraint of the senses. Mental control of the senses requires strength. We practise small disciplines, like giving up coffee for a week, having coffee without sugar or getting up a little bit earlier each day. We take small disciplines and integrate them into our life to build self-confidence, to gain the confidence to apply greater discipline to the sense that we are working with. The practice of antar mouna develops mental control.

Uparati, sense withdrawal, is turning the mind away from objects of sensual desire and enjoyment. It is a state of mind that observes what is going on externally and internally. The practices of pratyahara, specifically antar mouna, assist this process and training. *Titiksha*, the power of endurance, the ability to face difficulties with calm patience is the fourth quality. We just keep going, in pleasure or pain, we continue whether we are in the mood or not. We develop tricks and techniques to strengthen our willpower.

Shraddha, faith, is an important quality. To feel the help of the invisible hands and remember that God or guru is with us, watching our activities, thoughts and motives. In the Old Testament *Proverbs* (3:5–6) it says:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

There is never a moment that the guru is not aware of us. I once asked Swamiji when I was going to go to Greece, “Will you be aware of any difficulties or problems that I face there?” He was silent for a little while and then said, “Yes, I will be aware of all of them,” which was very comforting. It is beautiful to know that guru is always aware of us. Guru has eyes and ears everywhere. He can switch to a state of consciousness at will, beyond body, mind and object, in which he is aware of anyone at any given time. He knows exactly what we are going through, what we are saying and thinking, and what our motives are. He is particularly concerned with the motives more than the action. Swami Satyananda said, “You can doubt your own ability to achieve, but if you have faith in guru and he says you can move a mountain, you will do it. There is no greater love than faith.”

Be calm, bear insult patiently, bear injury, suffering, failures and disrespect calmly. Do not be elated by praise, pleasure, success and honour. Look upon both with equal vision. Behave alike towards friends and foes. Never let anything disturb your inner peace.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

The innermost part of our personality is full of illumination, full of knowledge, full of peace and full of bliss. Those who know how to get there, at least for a few seconds every day, know how to maintain peace, tranquillity, equanimity and strength in their lives.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Equanimity is being even tempered, even in extreme situations. It is being balanced in heat and cold, in happiness and suffering. One who travels the path with clarity, who is not influenced by opposites and is not ruffled, is a balanced person.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The last quality is *samadhana*, or mental balance, which is the fruit of shama, dama, uparati, titiksha and shraddha. It is fixing the mind on God, on the self, on whatever appeals to us, and not allowing it to run in any other direction. It is a state of mind that is totally free from any form of anxiety.

Vichara

Another tool to develop equanimity is *vichara*, or self-enquiry, asking ourselves or contemplating, 'Who am I?' Like the beautiful song:

*I am not the body, I am not the mind,
I am not the senses, immortal Self am I.*

It is not an intellectual understanding; it is making the effort to disassociate from the body. If I can witness the body, I am not the body; something inside me is witnessing the body. If I can witness the actions, the senses, the thoughts in the mind, the emotions and desires, then who is witnessing? It must be beyond the mind, but who is it? What is it? Vichara is that kind of self-enquiry: negating what we are not, to discover what we are.

Why worry

Swami Niranjan is the epitome of equanimity, balance and harmony. He is in full control of his mind on every single occasion, a total master of every situation that he comes across. He has often told the following story.

When he first came to Greece in 1979, it was difficult to enter the country. For him to come to Greece, we had to have numerous papers stamped by various officials. We had everything in order. When he arrived at the airport, the Greek officials asked him whether he was carrying any money. He said no. To the Greek mind that is a catastrophe, someone travelling without any money, what sort of person is this? So they detained him. I was waiting. One hour passed, two hours passed, three hours passed, I was going around through offices, making telephone calls and trying to find out what was happening.

During this time Swamiji was sitting in the airport and there was a lady who was also having a problem with her visa, who was extremely agitated and worried. She was walking up and down, backwards and forwards, smoking cigarettes. She said to Swamiji, “How can you be so calm in this situation? They may not let you into the country.” Swamiji said, “It is okay, if they don’t let me in I will go back.” He has total equanimity in any kind of situation. Swamiji’s was a positive example for that lady, he would have benefited just by being there with him.

FIXITY

Synonyms

stability	steady
constant one-pointedness	stable
decidedness	focused
determination	determined
purposefulness	non-volatile.

Antonyms

indefiniteness	fickleness
uncertainty	

From equanimity, fixity arises. Through equanimity the mind becomes steady and balanced, enabling us to focus, become one-pointed and fixed on one goal. Fixity is being stable and constant, focusing on one’s aim and achieving it. Swami Niranjan says that the creative response is not possible if a person is not focused.

If we cannot make our mind one-pointed, the creativity which is inherent in us is blocked, it cannot come to the surface easily. When there is no aim or focus awareness is easily dissipated. When we have fixity, in relation to the aim and focus, our awareness assists and guides us in that direction.

Lesson in archery

There is the story of Dronacharya from the *Mahabharata*. He was the guru of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. He was teaching archery to the young boys to test their ability to focus and concentrate. One day, he asked one after the other to come forward and set their mark on a clay bird which he had placed on a tree. He asked each one of them to draw their bow and arrow and to hit the eye of the bird. However, before they shot the arrow, Drona asked, "What do you see?" Each one of them replied, "Oh, I see the bird, I see the clouds, I see the tree, I see the sun, I see a mountain in the background." Drona would then say, "Take your bow and arrow and go. Don't even try."

Finally he called Arjuna. Arjuna fixed his bow and arrow and, when Drona said, "What do you see?" Arjuna replied, "I see only the eye of the bird." Drona said, "Then, shoot." The arrow went straight through the eye of the bird.

That is fixity. The others were not fixed; they were seeing too many other things. Their minds were dissipated, distracted and attracted by scenery and objects. They could not focus on one object. Fixity is that one-pointedness which focuses on the target only. The teacher gives us a goal and we have to identify with that target and keep going until we succeed.

Yogic practices

In the beginning of meditation three elements are involved: an experience or aim of meditation, the process of meditation and the practitioner. When one focuses on the three, the process is called *pratyahara*. When the practitioners drop physical awareness, the process and practice becomes the vehicle that takes them to the aim. The practitioner is aware of the practice and the aim. This is *dharana*, concentration. When they reach the aim and identify totally with it, that is *dhyana*, meditation. Fixity means a focused state of mind

It also implies that once we have made a decision we stick to it, we avoid changing the mind. We make a *sankalpa*, a resolution, and do everything possible to fulfil and realize it.

Guru's mandate

Swami Satyananda received a mandate from his guru, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'. For twenty years, he worked ceaselessly to make this mandate become a reality. He travelled many times around the globe, and the length and breadth of India, he built Ganga Darshan and wrote over eighty books – all with one purpose and with one-pointed dedication to his guru's mandate.

Swami Niranjan received his mandate from Sri Swamiji and never wavered, no matter what. In 2009, he was given the blueprint from Sri Swamiji for the next twenty years of his life, and there is no doubt that he will see it through, due to his fixity and one-pointed commitment to his guru's wish and mandate. He will not give up until his goal is reached.

Remember that you cannot achieve anything if you are fickle-minded. Choose your goal or ideal and remember it always. Never let it go out of mind even for a moment.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

One should have living faith in higher things. One should have an aim. This is very important. The moment one loses faith and forgets the aim, one succumbs to anger, jealousy, greed, passion or delusion.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Fixity is being stable and constant, one-pointed. It is an attitude of total identification and merging with the object of contemplation. Yoga gives you an aim, and you have to identify with it. If instead you see everything around the aim, your awareness can easily be dissipated and diverted. However, when you only see the aim, and focus on that, then the world disappears and only you and the aim remain.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Adaptability

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Synonyms

adjustability

flexibility

plasticity

accommodating

fluidity

suppleness

going with the flow

Antonyms

rigidity

hardness

fear of change

Through fixity the mind is able to focus, be stable and constant; this allows us to work with non-irritability and adaptability. We have created and strengthened a foundation for adaptability. The patience, tolerance and the ability to go with the flow that we developed through the practice of non-irritability, leads to adaptability. To quote the famous words of Swami Sivananda: “Adapt, adjust, and accommodate to changing circumstances and other people.” He continues, “Adaptability is the knack of winning the hearts of others and, ultimately, the battle of life by a little bit of bending. If you want to adapt yourself to all, you must be flexible, humble and simple, gentle and soft. Adaptability kills selfishness and develops universal love. The world runs on adaptability. An adaptable person can move about harmoniously with anybody in the world. Adaptability gives immense strength and

profound joy. It develops a strong will and balance of mind. Adaptability develops the feeling of oneness or unity of life.”

Circumstances are always changing. It is good to have a plan or a running schedule for the day or week, but we must be prepared for change. Change is just around the corner. We need to be flexible and able to accept change. Adaptability is also adapting to the various personality types discussed in relation to equanimity.

When we are quick enough with adaptability we can use it to ‘save’ a situation. Sometimes situations arise out of the blue, a person with a quick mind can change a difficult or negative situation into something positive. There is a beautiful example of Swami Sivananda’s ability to quickly save a situation. One day he had a group of people in for afternoon tea. His disciples had brought out the best porcelain china to serve the tea to the guests. One lady was so nervous, being in the presence of the great master, that her cup was clattering on the saucer as she picked it up to drink and she dropped it. The cup fell on the floor and broke into many pieces. Swami Sivananda immediately said, “Ah, now I know how the One became many!” Thus, he saved the situation from being potentially embarrassing and uncomfortable.

COMMUNICATION

Understanding and adapting to others involves a touch of psychology. We need to have a basic understanding of how people are and what their psychological make-up is. Just a glimpse of it helps us to adapt to others and improve our communication. We should not expect others to adapt to us. We should make the effort and take the first step when working with adaptability.

In addition to adapting to various personality types, we learn to adapt and communicate with people of other cultures and backgrounds. An ashram is an ideal place to learn this because the residents and visitors are from many parts of the world, they have different cultural habits and

languages. When someone speaks a foreign language it can appear to be more abrupt or aggressive than intended. Here are some styles of communication.

No communication: We hear with the ears only. We don't process what we hear and the words go in one ear and out the other. The person who speaks and the person who listens are transmitting on different wavelengths, and therefore they do not communicate.

Coloured communication: This type of communication takes place through coloured glasses, which means each person understands and expresses according to their point of view, without considering the view of the other person. The hearing is selective, perhaps due to past interactions with that person. Maybe there are inner prejudices, grudges, misunderstandings or bitterness being held from past communication. As a result the person does not want to hear what the other has to say. There can also be mental programming carried from childhood, such as old opinions and conditionings that don't allow us to hear what is being said. Selective communication comes from the attitude, "I don't want to communicate with you," or "I refuse to believe you can change," or "I don't want to adapt and share this space and environment with you."

Real communication: This type of communication is proof of adaptability in interactions with others. The effort is made to put aside what we want to say and actively listen to the other person. Real communication is applying our skills to suit the needs of the person we are communicating with.

Real communication is the ability to be at the level of the other person and observe whether they are communicating through emotional reactions or through logic, reasoning and common sense. If a person is reacting emotionally there is not much point in reacting back. Instead we allow time for that person to vent and calm down by remaining quiet and letting them speak. If the person is using common sense and reasoning, we tune into their logic and put emotions aside.

Yes, you are absolutely right

In 1984, in Paris, Swami Satyananda gave a beautiful lecture on the *Bhagavad Gita*. After the lecture, as we came to the foyer, a man who obviously had a different opinion about the lecture and a strong commanding voice, shouted, "What you said is nonsense! What you have said is completely incorrect." And he continued: Krishna didn't say that; he said this. Arjuna didn't say that; he said the other. He was adamant about everything he was saying and the tone of voice was loud and aggressive. At that time, we were a group of young disciples around Sri Swamiji and we didn't know what to do. We didn't know whether or not to intervene.

Sri Swamiji let the man shout, when there was a short pause he said, "You're absolutely right." He only had time for that, before the man started again. Each time there was a momentary pause, Sri Swamiji would say, "You're absolutely right." The five hundred people from the audience had by now gathered in the foyer listening to the exchange. After about the tenth time of Sri Swamiji saying, "You're absolutely right," the man said, "You really believe that I am absolutely right?" Swamiji said, "Yes, you're right! It is a valid point of view." From here the conversation started, and without aggression they had an interesting discussion on the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the end the man succumbed to Sri Swamiji's views.

While living with the guru one of the most important ways to learn is witnessing how the guru handles everyday situations. We see real examples of equanimity, adaptability and all the ITIES practised with ease, grace and dignity.

Real communication avoids confronting the minds of others. Reactions are often connected to the areas of our personality where we feel most vulnerable, due to unresolved issues, traumas or abuses we have faced in life. Each of us has certain vulnerabilities due to these old, unresolved wounds that we carry within us. They have become part of our personality and are held in the shadow.

The shadow is that part of the mind which consists of unresolved issues. It is a collection of experiences, along

with feelings of shame, guilt or fear, that we have long since forgotten, but they are there because they are unresolved. We can release them through awareness and by becoming the witness. The mask that we present to others hides the unresolved parts of ourselves. However, during the day, people press buttons that trigger old experiences causing them to come to the surface. They rise in the mind either consciously or unconsciously. If we are aware of our vulnerabilities, we can recognize our triggers, adapt – and avoid reaction.

To avoid reaction we observe that our buttons are being pushed, sense our initial reaction, pause, reflect on possible responses and choose to act in the best possible manner. By choosing an action rather than reacting impulsively we develop emotional control.

Chakras	Expressions of each chakra	Example of wounds	Vulnerabilities resulting from the wound
Mooladhara	Security	Feeling rejected or abandoned	Insecurity, fear
Swadhisthana	Joy	Feeling abused	Suppressed desires, sexuality, guilt
Manipura	Power	Feeling shamed or dominated	Control issues, power games, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, shame
Anahata	Love	Feeling betrayed	Unmet love, lack of meaningful relationships and self-confidence
Vishuddhi	Communication	Feeling humiliated	Inability to communicate well
Ajna	Intellect	Having faced injustice	Lack of clarity and common sense, inability to make decisions

The above table gives an idea of vulnerabilities in relation to the chakras. The wounds are referring to aspects that

can develop as the chakras are developing at an early age. The last column is the vulnerabilities that are related to that wound. For example, in a baby, mooladhara is forming, which relates to security. If we feel rejection or experience abandonment as a baby or young child, even if we have not been rejected or abandoned at all, the feeling results in insecurity and fear. Therefore, when someone presses that 'rejection' button, insecurity comes to the surface. Or if someone expresses that they disapprove of us we are triggered to feel uncomfortable and awkward. These are the vulnerabilities that we have within us.

A real communicator tries to avoid pushing buttons in people. Real communication is not confronting the minds of others. Swami Satyananda felt strongly about this saying, "One of the precepts of tantra is not to confront the mind of another person."

Another factor in real communication involves the ability to appeal to the higher mind of the other person. There is an example from my childhood while living with my family. My grandmother was a wonderful woman but a little bit abrupt. When my brother was studying for exams, she went to him in the evening and said, "It is time to take out the dustbin so the garbage man can collect it in the morning." My brother didn't move; he continued studying. My mother had another approach. She said, "Darling, I know you are studying now, but when you have a moment, if you could please take out the dustbin. When your father comes home from work he will be tired and need to rest, so if you could take out the dustbin for him that would be of great help." Immediately, my brother got up, took out the dustbin and went back to his study. My mother knew how to appeal to the higher qualities in my brother's mind. He didn't want to make his dad tired, so he got up and carried out the task. A real communicator finds the right way to say something to get a job done.

Effortless communication: Finally, there is effortless communication, the direct reception of the message from the

source. This takes place when there is no intervention. When there is no ego, no mental programming intervenes with the communication with God, guru and the self. It is communication from heart to heart, without ego, but with total unity, comprehension and understanding. This communication takes place when there is the feeling of love between guru and disciple.

We mentioned the types of personality that we have to adapt to: the tyrant, the coward, the fickle person, the indecisive person, the complainer, the blamer, the angry type, the perfectionist, the hypocrite. There is also the person who is gifted to always say and do the right thing at the right time – and there is the person who likes to gossip. There are ways we can learn to communicate with all these personalities effectively.

ADAPT, ADJUST, ACCOMMODATE

Swami Sivananda used the three words, “adapt, adjust, accommodate,” to indicate the need for openness and flexibility. Adapting implies acceptance of new conditions, when we adapt we try to blend two perspectives and may end up accepting one which is not our own. As we adjust we are willing to alter or regulate our opinion, a situation, or the environment we are in. A change is required and we have to be ready to leave our normal comfort zone. When we accommodate we not only have to make room for change, we also have to make an effort to bring harmony into the new situation.

Mental rigidity and being opinionated are barriers to adaptability, and sometimes we have to be quick-minded. Here are a few stories illustrating how one can adjust to situations in a positive way, without hurting or harming another person but still protecting oneself against negative influences of aggression or crookedness.

The moneylender

Once there was a crooked moneylender and a merchant who owed him a lot of money. The merchant had a beautiful daughter. One day the moneylender met the merchant and his daughter on the beach, which was scattered with white and black pebbles. He said, "Look I am going to make a proposition. I am going to put two pebbles in this bag and your daughter has to pick out a pebble. If she picks the black pebble, she marries me and your debt is cancelled. If she picks the white pebble, she doesn't have to marry me and the debt is still cancelled."

The girl was nervous and worried, for the last thing she wanted was to marry this old, crooked moneylender. The father was also anxious and didn't want his daughter to marry the moneylender. In her fright, the girl became alert and saw that the moneylender picked up two black pebbles and quickly put them in the bag. He then said to the girl, "Now, choose a pebble. Remember that you have three choices: You pick the black pebble, you marry me and the debt is cleared; you pick the white pebble and you don't have to marry me, and we will clear the debt; or you don't pick a pebble and your father will go to jail."

Now the question is: how could she escape marrying the moneylender? The girl was quick and knew how to adapt to the situation, the personality of the moneylender and the three choices she was given.

She picked one pebble from the bag, and without showing the colour of the pebble she had picked, dropped it on the ground, which was filled with black and white pebbles. The girl exclaimed, "Oh, I'm so sorry, I dropped my pebble, now we can't tell which pebble it was because all the pebbles on the beach are black and white. Oh, what to do?" Then she quickly continued, "But we do know the colour of the pebble left in the bag, so we know that I have chosen the opposite colour." The moneylender didn't want to own up to being deceitful, and the girl, having outsmarted him, escaped by adapting to the situation.

Snake in the village

There is a famous story about *ahimsa*, non-violence, told in the Vedas, the vast collection of ancient philosophical teachings of India. The story is about a sadhu, who would make a yearly circuit to a number of villages in order to teach. One day as he entered a village, he saw a large and menacing snake. The snake was terrorizing the villagers and making their life difficult. The sadhu spoke to the snake and taught him about ahimsa, the way of non-violence. It was a lesson that the snake heard and took to heart.

The following year when the sadhu made his annual visit to the village, he again saw the snake. How changed he was. This once magnificent snake was now skinny and bruised. The sadhu asked the snake what had happened to cause such a change in his appearance. The snake replied that he had taken the teaching of ahimsa to heart and had realized the error of his ways. Thus he had stopped terrorizing the village and, as he was no longer menacing, the children threw rocks at him and taunted him. He could hardly hunt and was afraid to leave his hiding place. The sadhu shook his head wisely and said, “Last year when I came, I did indeed teach you about the importance and power of practising ahimsa, but I never told you not to hiss.”

Even in regard to eternal values and principles such as ahimsa, we need to use discrimination and adaptability. Making a choice to protect others and ourselves does not violate ahimsa. On the other hand, to allow violence to occur is not an expression of ahimsa. Staying ‘neutral’ or in the case of the snake – hissing but not harming – is in reality a form of action, and often the best form. The snake did not know how to adapt to the bullies in the village and had to suffer the consequences.

A child with children, a king with kings

In the 1990s, Sri Swamiji invited representatives of various religions to Rikhia. He not only allowed them to conduct and celebrate their form of worship, but he and Swami Niranjan

participated and played an active role in it. They dressed like the Sikhs with the Sikhs, like Christian ministers with the Christian group from Australia, and joined the Greek Orthodox in every way. They made everyone feel comfortable: the religious delegates, the participants who had come from all over the world representing many religions and creeds, and participants from every state of India representing the great variety of beliefs, customs and cultures of the country. There was never a moment of awkwardness during the programs, but everything was carried out in goodwill and good humour. It was a magnificent demonstration of adaptability, which created true communion and understanding among those present. It gave them a message to take home.

Swami Niranjan has perfected the art of adaptability. At Ganga Darshan, he meets with locals, guests from all over India, overseas visitors, he interacts with children and the Munger youth, with the rich and the less privileged, with people who have come for a few days, for a course, for long-term training or as residents of the ashram. No one is left out, no one is disappointed, no one feels neglected. He adapts to the various personalities and idiosyncrasies.

On his world tours, we can observe and learn from his mastery of adapting. He adapted with ease to the different countries, religions, languages and foods. In South America, in Bogotá, he conducted a fire ceremony with a shaman according to their tradition. Later, Swamiji conducted the havan according to our tradition, and he gave a talk about the similarity between the two traditions, so the shaman felt comfortable and felt that he was with someone who understood his way of life. On safari in South Africa, Swamiji enjoyed the company of animals, playing with the baby lions. In Venice, he took the boats through the canals, in Australia he was present at an aboriginal dance show and in Greece he joined in the Greek dancing and became proficient in it. Travelling in India, he is a sadhu with the sadhus.

Practising adaptability with the various personality types removes selfishness. It takes skill, patience and regular effort

to develop adaptability. Change and the need to adapt has been a topic of contemplation throughout the ages:

Men are born soft and supple; dead they are stiff and hard. Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death. Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of life.

—*Tao Te Ching*

Events happen as they do. Circumstances do not rise to meet our expectations. People behave as they are. We need to learn to embrace and adapt to what we actually receive as being the best possible situation to be in for our future growth.

Things themselves don't hurt or hinder us, nor do other people; it is our lack of adaptability and how we view these things in other people that creates the problem. It is our attitudes and reactions that give us trouble. We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we will adapt and respond to them.

—*Epictotus*

You can never step into the same river twice; for other waters are ever flowing on to you. Everything flows, nothing stands still.

—*Heraclitus*

Change alone is perpetual, eternal, immortal.

—*Schopenhauer*

Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death.

—*Anais Nin*

The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.

—*William Arthur Ward*

Understand well the nature of people with whom you come into contact. Adjust your mode of approach to them. Adjust yourself in such a way as to be pleasing to them. Joyfully bear with the eccentricities of others. Always react in a harmonious manner.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Abuses, insults, injuries, taunts, harassments and discomforts have all strengthened my personality. Let me repeat the mantra which my guru whispered into my ear: Adapt, adjust, accommodate; bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest sadhana.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

If you are sitting in a boat being rocked by big waves, you have to move your body to the movement of the boat. If you sit rigidly, you may tumble over. This is how adaptability and adjustment has to take place in every situation. Yoga means finding a balance in every situation.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Practice: Antar darshan on adaptability

Please take a comfortable position. You may lie down or remain seated. Just ensure that you have a steady and comfortable position. Your spine is erect, shoulders relaxed, chin slightly forward, hands in chin or jnana mudra, placed on your knees, and eyes gently closed. Take a few moments to find the position that suits you and is comfortable, so that you can relax without further movement; a position where you feel at ease, at comfort with your body.

Now become aware of the sounds around you, the other people in the room, the environment in the room.

Gently bring the awareness to your breath, the spontaneous natural breath, and become aware of each inhalation and each exhalation, aware of how and

where you are breathing, through the nose or through the mouth, whether your breathing is fast or slow, deep or shallow, whether your breathing has a regular or an irregular rhythm. Just be aware of the spontaneous natural breath and the deep and intimate connection between the breath and the mind. Slow, deep breathing quiets the mind and shallow, fast breathing agitates the mind.

When you feel comfortable with your natural breathing, gradually adjust it so that it becomes slower and deeper. Slow, deep breathing, and if you are familiar with ujjayi pranayama, adjust your breathing to ujjayi, otherwise continue with the natural breathing, but make it slower and deeper; as slow and deep as you comfortably can, without strain and without force.

With your next inhalation, bring your awareness into the chest cavity, *hridayakasha*, the heart space, and visualize a small flame burning with a glow of golden light around it. As you inhale, the golden glow expands, as you exhale, the golden glow diminishes. With every inhalation, the glow expands; with every exhalation, the glow diminishes. Visualize this explosion and implosion of light in *hridayakasha*. Then gradually allow that image of the implosion and explosion of light to move into the background.

Keeping that glow of light in the background, become aware of your recent interactions: with one another or with family members, within your work environment, with friends, with associates, with anyone that you have interacted with in the last few days.

Antar darshan deals with recent interactions. Become aware of recent interactions that you have had with various people, and how you have reacted and responded to them.

Sooner or later one of the interactions will become more prominent, and when that happens, focus on it and observe your reaction and whether you could have

improved on that. If you had the chance again, how would you react? How would you respond? How would you handle the situation? Imagine or visualize handling that situation better, improving on it.

Now move your awareness to your work-related interaction. Become aware of how you relate, how you interact with your peers, how you interact with your in-charge and how you interact with those who assist you and work for you. Become aware of how you adapt to the people working together with you in a team, a committee, or group.

Become aware of the different personality types in the group, and find a way to deal with each of the personalities, according to your understanding of their psychology. Be aware of any recent interactions with your peers, with the people you work with, that have created strong reactions, either from you or from them. Imagine or visualize, if such an occasion arises in the future, how you could handle it better, to avoid any form of unpleasant reaction, either on your side or on their side. Imagine it, visualize it intensely.

Become aware now, of how you take orders or instructions from others. How do you respond internally? Are you able to maintain external equilibrium, which is the second stage that you are trying to acquire in pratyahara? Maybe there is an internal reaction taking place, but externally, you keep a bland expression, not revealing what is going on inside you.

In the same way look at your peers, and when you react, or they react, are you able to maintain external equilibrium, without showing what is going on inside you, what you are thinking or what you are feeling?

The same applies for the people who work for you, who you give orders or instructions to, and who report back to you. Be aware of any conflict or other recent interactions there, and how you adapted to them. Be aware whether you were able to maintain external equilibrium in regard

to the situation and to the reaction you may be going through.

Become aware of your feelings towards the people you work with, and also try to see and understand how they feel about you. What are their feelings about you? How do they see you? Do they feel comfortable with you? Are you setting a work environment where the people you work with feel comfortable with you?

Become aware of recent interactions together: with your in-charge, your peers, or those who assist and work for you. Be especially aware of any predominant reactions that have occurred and whether you have been able to maintain mental equilibrium in dealing with it, regardless of what is going on inside your mind. Have you been able to not react, but instead pause and choose an appropriate course of action?

Be aware of the importance of adaptability and how you can apply it today, in the interactions that are coming your way.

Now gently relax your efforts and return your awareness to that golden glow in hridayakasha, in the background, expanding and diminishing. Allow unwanted reactions and feelings to dissolve and disintegrate within that fire. Now return your awareness to your breathing, observe its regularity, its spontaneity. Gradually return your awareness to the sounds around you, to the external environment, the people in the room, the position that you are either lying or sitting in, and when you feel ready, gently relax your bodies, relax your position, and slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Humility, Tenacity and Integrity

20th April 2013

HUMILITY

Synonyms

modesty	meekness
demureness	obedience
respectful	unpretentiousness
considering no one as inferior	

Antonyms

arrogance	pride
egoism	a feeling of self-importance
pretentiousness	

Humility is the hallmark of a great human being. It is the highest virtue. From the respect and consideration for others that arose through our effort to adapt, adjust and accommodate to the various situations, we have become more humble.

When we say, “Oh, you can do that much better than I,” although, we are feeling that we could do a better job, we put on a show of humility. Pretence, self-demeaning and belittling oneself are aspects of false humility. False humility can also be expressed by looking humble with the head bowed, the shoulders a little stooped and a humble expression, but there is no true humility inside.

True humility develops inner strength and stamina. It also develops a feeling of gratitude for what we have been given. If ever we stop to think how fortunate we are, we feel grateful for everything that is coming our way, we lose our arrogance and realize everything has its place in the scheme of things.

The Navy ship

Off the coast of Maine, USA, there was a Navy ship sailing in dense fog. This night, the midshipman saw a fixed light in the distance and immediately contacted his captain, "There is a light in the distance heading straight for us, what do you want me to do?" The captain told him to flash a signal to the vessel, directing it to change course. The vessel signalled back, "No, you change your course." Again the captain instructed the midshipman to command the oncoming vessel to change its course immediately. Again the reply was, "No, you change your course." With one last attempt, the midshipman signalled the vessel saying, "This is the Captain of a US Navy battleship and you are to change your course immediately." The reply was, "No, you change your course. This is a lighthouse."

This story illustrates how we can let power 'go to our head'. Expressing vanity in the form of arrogance does not allow us to see or understand circumstances clearly.

Thank you

Real humility combines consideration and respect for others by recognizing their value and importance. Ultimately, this attitude develops the feeling or desire to be of service.

The feeling of service comes with humility, which is shown clearly in an anecdote from the life of Swami Sivananda. One day, he went to give satsang at a devotee's home. The hostess had spent a lot of time preparing the food and the house to make sure that everything was ready to receive the guru and guests. The satsang went on a little longer than usual and Swami Sivananda had a train to catch.

The disciples around him were saying, “Swamiji, you have to finish the satsang now, you have to go. We will miss the train if you continue any longer.” So Swami Sivananda got up, got in the car and went towards the train station.

On the way, he remembered that he hadn’t thanked the hostess for the effort she had made. He said, “Stop the car. I am going back. I haven’t thanked the hostess.” The organizers and disciples in the car said, “Swamiji, you can’t go back for you will miss the train and if you miss the train, you will miss the next program.” Swami Sivananda was adamant and said, “No, I must go back. I must thank the hostess. It is not right that she made so much effort and I left the house without saying a word to her.”

He went back and asked her forgiveness. He bowed down, touched her feet and said, “Forgive me for not thanking you for the beautiful hospitality and everything that you had

Respect everybody. Bow with folded hands before all. Do not talk in a loud voice before elders and venerable persons. See the Lord in all and feel that you are his servant, and so, the servant of all. Consider none as inferior to you.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Be on the alert when you do service in society: Unselfish service of any kind, platform lectures of any kind or any kind of public activity will surely bring you name and fame. Treat them as poison. Become very humble. You have to interact with your society, family and friends in a tender and humble way.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

The key to humility is consideration. When we are able to develop the faculty of consideration, then a natural attitude of respect develops within us, which takes us to humility.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

arranged for me. It was amiss of me to have left the house without thanking you properly.” This is a beautiful example of humility. Swami Sivananda’s high principles did to allow him to leave without behaving correctly and appropriately.

Where do I find the holy man?

The following story is another example of the attitude of humility. Word spread across the countryside of a wise holy man who lived in a small house at the top of the mountain. A man from a distant village decided to make the long and difficult journey to visit him. When he arrived at the house, an old, shabbily dressed man greeted him at the door. “I would like to see the wise, holy man,” said the villager. The man smiled and led him inside. As they walked through the house, the villager looked around eagerly, anticipating his encounter with the holy man.

Before he knew it, he had been led to the back door and escorted outside. He stopped and turned to the man, “But I want to see the holy man!” “You already have,” said the old man. Looking at the man’s confused expression, he continued: “Approach everyone you meet, even if they appear plain and insignificant, as a wise, holy person. This will develop humility in daily life.”

Obedience and understanding

In his ashram Gandhi wanted his wife to set the example and show the other women how to behave. So Gandhi said to his wife, “The new rule in the ashram is for everyone to clean the latrines, and you are to set the example.” She said, “Look here, other people may follow you. You may be the leader for thousands or millions of people, but I am your wife and I have known you since we were children. I am not going to follow your lead in this. I am a Brahmin and I have never cleaned a latrine.” Gandhi said, “It is not me you are following, it is the principle.” She understood that she was following the high moral principle of humility, and without another word she went to work.

When Swami Satyananda was living in Munger, he asked that the septic tank be cleaned which is not a pleasant job. None of the disciples were keen to go in. They all stood there thinking, “Oh no, it’s too yucky in there. I don’t want to go in.” Without hesitation, Swami Niranjan jumped into the septic tank, dhoti and all, and started to clean it. This is a true expression of total obedience and humility.

TENACITY

Synonyms

courage	moral fibre
determination	resolution
firmness	resolve
fortitude	stamina
committed	steadfastness
guts	willpower
hardihood	endurance
fortitude	a non-defeatist attitude

Antonyms

indifference	spinelessness
irresolution	fear
slackness	

Humility develops inner strength and stamina which assists us in practising and maintaining tenacity. Tenacity is that which enables us to keep on going no matter what. Like in Rudyard Kipling’s poem ‘If’:

*If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’*

This is an expression of tenacity: to keep going, even when we don’t feel we have the strength, when we think we cannot

take another step or manage anymore. A tenacious person will find strength within.

Tenacity is also holding firmly onto our beliefs and principles, in spite of setbacks and challenges. Tenacity is finding out what our principles are, being true to them and ourselves. Once we discover the principles that we hold dear, we will never compromise.

Tenacity is having the courage to face the consequences of our decisions and choices. It is the belief that what happens in life is destined to be, nothing happens by chance or coincidence. It is our karma and we can't change it. The only choice we have is how we respond or react. How we react, what we do, say and how we behave triggers the respective consequence. We create our future. We are responsible for our future, and whatever we are facing is the consequence of past action.

Pawanmuktasana and mountains

In the late 1970s, I accompanied Swami Niranjana to a program in Zinal, Switzerland, which had been organized by the European Yoga Federations for yoga teachers. Swami Niranjana was asked to talk on kriya yoga. In his first session, he introduced pawanmuktasana, and for two weeks he spoke about pawanmuktasana.

I was amazed at his strength and stamina to teach the yoga teachers pawanmuktasana. Not one of them knew anything about pawanmuktasana, so they loved the course. They didn't miss kriya yoga but were so happy doing pawanmuktasana. In those days, when a swami travelled he conducted all the sessions, which included, early morning class, lecture, workshop, yoga nidra, afternoon meditation and evening program. Between those programs there were small breaks. What did Swamiji do during the breaks? He climbed the mountains, with me following slowly behind him. He didn't actually walk up the mountain, he ran up the mountain! He ran up the mountain, got to the peak and then raced down at tremendous speed.

When we got to the bottom of the mountain, he went to the tennis court, picked up a tennis racquet, gave me one and we started to play. I had hardly caught my breath from the mountain climbing and we were playing tennis. About five minutes before the program was to start, we stopped the tennis game and raced to the venue. No time to change clothes or go to the bathroom, nothing at all. He walked in and gave the class. That is tenacity.

The lesson of the spider

Tenacity is a non-defeatist attitude, not backing away until the goal has been achieved. Robert the Bruce, the King of Scotland, was fighting to free Scotland from the British. He had lost many men and many battles and was feeling extremely depressed and defeated. On the eve of the decisive battle, he found a cave and sat down. He suddenly noticed a small spider on the ground of the cave. The spider was trying to reach the roof of the cave to spin her web in a corner. Each time she started to climb a few steps, she would fall down and then start again. She went a little higher and then fell down. Hundreds of times, the small spider tried to reach the roof of the cave and hundreds of times she fell.

Robert the Bruce was amazed at the tenacity, strength and determination of the spider. She spent the whole night in this way and it was around dawn that she finally managed to reach the roof, where she started to spin her web. Robert the Bruce was so inspired, he went out and gave a famous speech to his men, encouraging them that no matter what failures they faced, no matter how tired, how dejected they were, they must go and win the battle and free Scotland from the British. And they did.

The donkey

Tenacity combined with cleverness and sharpened awareness often is the means to save one's life and maybe that of others as well. Tenacity means not giving up, looking for

opportunities to come out of a tight spot, gaining strength, increasing willpower and determination.

One day there was a farmer whose donkey had fallen into a deep well. The donkey was crying piteously for release. The farmer looked down the well and thought, “What can I do? There is no way I can get that donkey out of the well. Anyway, the donkey is old and has done his service. We will bury the donkey down there.” So the farmer called his neighbours, and with shovels and picks they scooped up soil and put it into the well. When the donkey realized what was happening, it was horrified and cried out even more. Suddenly, there was silence. The farmers looked down the well and saw that with every shovel-full of dirt, the little donkey was shaking the dirt

Tenacity is the natural friend of fixity; once you have fixed your aim and chosen your path, stick to it. Never compromise on your fundamental principles. Say to yourself, “I may give up my life, but I will not swerve from the path. I will not break my vows.”

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

An alert driver who is clear about his destiny and is able to command and steer his senses is bound to attain his goal. Know everything, learn everything, accept everything – but mind is one, goal is one, spirit is one, direction is one.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Tenacity is holding firmly onto one’s beliefs, which means having a clear mind. Normally, we don’t hold on to our beliefs, we hold on to a conditioning. The conditionings can be convictions, but nevertheless, it is a conditioning. That is what has to change, so that with the true state of expanded awareness, we can discriminate between the appropriate and the inappropriate, and maintain the appropriate belief.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

off onto the ground and stepping up a little bit higher. With each shovel-full of dirt that went in, the donkey was able to raise itself a little higher, a little higher, until it was at the top of the well, and could walk out happily.

In life we face a lot of dirt, criticism and animosity. These are situations we go through to evolve. We can see them as learning experiences and an opportunity to develop the ITIES. We can learn from the donkey, whatever dirt is thrown on us, we shake it off and use it as a stepping-stone to go one step further ahead on our path.

INTEGRITY

Synonyms

honour	virtue
coherence	soundness
forthrightness	completeness
goodness	wholeness
honesty	steadfast
incorruptibility	adherence to ethical code

Antonyms

corruption	dishonour
disgrace	

As we focus on our goals, without forsaking values and principles and without giving up, we eventually develop integrity. Integrity is being honest, truthful and leading a life of righteousness. When Swami Niranjan was in Greece, in 2000, he said, “The definition of dharma in Sanskrit is ‘the beauty that you hold within and that you express’ – *dharyate iti dharma*. Express the beautiful you, and you will be a dharmic person.” It is a striking definition for dharma. *Dharma* is leading a life of righteousness, being a good person, adhering to one’s code of honour and high principles, and living accordingly.

The new king

An ageing king decided on a novel way to choose his successor. He called the city's youths to his palace. Handing out some special seeds, he told them, "Go and plant these seeds. In a year's time, I will judge your plants and choose the new king." One boy took his pot home and planted the seed. Every day he watered it but nothing grew. His friends at school were talking about their growing plants, but this boy only had an empty pot.

When the day came to return to the palace, the boy went with a frightened heart. The king appeared. All the other youths had magnificent plants. When the king saw the boy's empty pot, he summoned him to the front and announced to the crowd, "Behold your new king! He has courage and integrity. For all the seeds I gave you were boiled and useless. He was the only one not to cheat. He will be a wise ruler over you all."

Develop an integral personality. Tie all the loose ends in your character. Become a man of high moral principles. Lead a life of righteousness. Everyone will trust you, obey you, respect you and revere you.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Creativity means to give the best of one's personality, and this is only possible if one has self-discipline. Discipline does not mean cruelty. It is a compassionate life of integration. Yoga is a system of techniques for stilling the turbulence of the mind, for harnessing it and maintaining its resilience. Therefore, aim at developing an integrated personality.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Integrity is trying to bring together the fractured personality.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The power of dharmic living

In the *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana represents the *adharmic* principle, unrighteousness, and Yudhishtira, the dharmic principle, righteousness. Yudhishtira saw good in all and Duryodhana saw only the negative. On one occasion, Sage Vyasa said to them, “I want you both to travel the world, Duryodhana you are to find a good man and Yudhishtira you are to find a bad man.”

A few months later they returned. Sage Vyasa asked Duryodhana, “Did you manage to find a good man?” Duryodhana said, “No! In the whole world there is no such thing as a good man.” Sage Vyasa said to Yudhishtira, “Did you find a bad man?” Yudhishtira replied “I could not find a bad man. I could only find good men.” Both Yudhishtira and Duryodhana went to the same places yet their perspective and attitude was different. Yudhishtira with his natural expression of honesty, integrity and righteousness saw the good qualities in all those he met.

The search for integrity is the constant effort to find harmony within oneself, and to communicate this harmony. We strive to live a life of integrity, to reconcile and harmonize the many aspects of our personality, to bring the physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual aspects into harmony. Action is an important part of integrity. Having integrity helps us to initiate positive action and express it creatively through the head, heart and hands. Therefore, developing an integral personality is an important part on the spiritual path. We can say that integrity is an expression of the sincerity within us, it is communicating our sincerity in thought, word and deed.

Unwavering commitment

Swami Niranjan lives and breathes dharma. Nothing will make him forsake dharma, righteousness, the good, right and appropriate. Swamiji Sivananda said, “Dharma is the virtue which upholds the world.” Swamiji lives a life of dharma; it is difficult and rare to find a person with his level of integrity.

When Swami Niranjan was called back to India from America in 1982, to take over the administration of the Bihar School of Yoga, he had just acquired land on which to establish an ashram in America. He told Sri Swamiji that he preferred to stay in America, “but one thing is definite, if you are calling me, then there is no power on earth that will stop me from coming to you.” In spite of the fact that his preference was to stay in America, when Sri Swamiji called him back he immediately made arrangements to discontinue the work he was involved in. He returned to India and set himself to the task of bringing the institution to the high standards we see today.



Nobility and Magnanimity

20th April 2013

NOBILITY

Synonyms

decency
dignity
generosity
refinement
greatness
honour
illustriousness
integrity
magnificence
stateliness

virtue
gracious
gentle
aristocratic
exalted
eminence
lofty
incorruptible
excellence

Antonyms

lowliness
impropriety
indecent
obscenity
ignoble
dishonourable
shameful
vulgar

low
base
unworthy
contemptible
coarse
indecent
shameless and offensive.

‘Aristos’ is a Greek word and means ‘first’ and ‘cratos’ means ‘state’. Aristocracy means, originally, ‘the first in the state’, the people who were the leaders or the nobles of the state were meant to set the example, through their nobility, to everyone else. Aristocracy today describes more a class, but in ancient days, they were the noble people who lived their principles.

Nobility arises from the effort we are making to develop high moral principles and an integrated personality. A noble person is one who is able to forgive and forget past misdeeds. A noble person has superiority of mind and a high moral character. He is dignified and refined in his bearing. Superiority of mind means possessing the qualities that every race, creed and religion considers good and noble. Sacrificing one’s interests in the interest of others is an act of nobility.

The book *The Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens is a true story that took place during the French Revolution. One character, the Scarlet Pimpernel, was put into prison to face the guillotine. In prison he met a young nobleman, who was also facing the guillotine. The nobleman was telling Scarlet Pimpernel how distraught he was. He had met the love of his life and they were planning to get married and live happily ever after. One day, a prison official came to announce that the Scarlet Pimpernel was allowed to be freed from the guillotine that day. The Scarlet Pimpernel, who had lived for himself all his life, said to the young man, “We will change places. No one will know the difference. We are the same height and build.” He took the place of the young nobleman. Just before he was beheaded, he said these words, “Tis a far, far better thing I do, than I have ever done. Tis a far, far better place I go, than I have ever been.”

Being noble and true in motive, thought, word and deed, we set an example for others. When we are living these qualities there also comes a responsibility, for we are the example for others to emulate. Nobility is making every effort to bring sadhana into daily life. Our sadhana should

not be only asana, pranayama and mantra. Effort can be made to spiritualize every moment of our life.

Swami Satyananda told us that to spiritualize life two things are important: One is to maintain awareness through which we spiritualize our actions, words, thoughts and motives. The second is, whatever we do, it should take us closer to ourselves and not away from ourselves. An ego-orientated action or discourse, in which we overpower a situation for our benefit or to present ourselves in a better light, takes us away from ourselves. Noble thoughts, words and deeds bring us closer to ourselves, spiritualizing our life. Every single activity of the day can be part of our spiritual sadhana.

Nobility is striving for excellence in everything we do. Swami Niranjan stresses the importance of excellence. If we can't manage to be excellent in everything we do, we can strive to be excellent in one particular field.

The strength of a noble person lies in the knowledge that they are a tool, an instrument in the hands of the guru and God. Being noble, they understand that the qualities are God-given and that it is the divine force moving through them that makes them noble. This divine force or greatness is coming from the consciousness or the guru tattwa within.

A noble person can admit mistakes and express it in a simple and honest way. Many people find it difficult to apologize if they have done something incorrect or wrong. They prefer to ignore it, dismiss it or hope it will be forgotten in the course of time. However, nobility requires that we admit our faults. When we admit a mistake internally we do not justify any action or excuse ourselves in any way. This relieves our conscience.

Swami Niranjan says that, of course, the guru knows everything that is going on in our mind: he knows when we have erred and when we haven't done what we should do. Nevertheless, it is necessary for us to verbalize it or at least acknowledge it in thought. In a quiet moment we admit where we were incorrect and what we should have done. It also fosters sincerity which relieves tension in the mind.

A noble person is one who treats all with equal care and respect and has time for all. When Swami Niranjan first came to Greece in 1978, we were a group of young people skipping and running down the street. There was one elderly man in the group who couldn't move as fast as the rest of us. Swamiji was trailing behind, assisting the elderly man. I still remember the gentleness, softness and support he was giving the man to make sure he felt part of the group and that he was not left behind. These are noble acts one sees when one has the opportunity to be in the presence of the guru. He is doing noble acts all the time, some we can see and others we cannot. Some are so subtle that we bypass them, but in our hearts we know that he is benevolent and is working behind the scenes.

Effie

A noble person is not concerned with the misconduct or defects of others, but sees and appreciates the good qualities. There is the story about Effie and her mother-in-law. Effie was a young girl. She was recently married and very much in love with her husband; they went to live with her mother-in-law. This mother-in-law criticized every move that Effie made, to the point that the husband and Effie became disturbed. The mother-in-law was cantankerous and angry all the time. So Effie said to herself, "I have to put an end to this."

She went to an old woman in the village called Mrs Wise, and said, "I have to do something about my mother-in-law. I would like you to give me a poisonous potion, so I can put a little in her food every day." Mrs Wise said, "Of course, I will mix the potion for you, but there are some conditions. You must make sure that whenever you give this potion you cook the best and most tasty food so that it will disguise the bitterness of the poison. You must always present this food in the best possible way and treat your mother-in-law as a noble person. You must treat her as you would wish her to be, with all the qualities that you would like her to have. Treat her like a noble person, someone very special."

Effie thought, “Well, that won’t be too difficult.” She asked, “How long do you think it will take before the poison works?” Mrs Wise said, “Well, everybody has a different constitution, so let’s see what happens.” Effie went home happy with the idea of the little bag of poison. She started to prepare the best possible food she could. Every day she was extremely polite, always made sure that her mother-in-law had the best seat and the best food. She told her mother-in-law how noble and honourable she was.

Her mother-in-law went through a tremendous transformation. She started to believe and feel that she had these positive qualities, she became less cantankerous and extremely sweet and kind. In fact, she became a pleasant person to have around the house. The husband was pleased, the mother-in-law was pleased. Effie too was pleased and went back to Mrs Wise, “Mrs Wise, I have changed my mind. I don’t want my mother-in-law to die. She has become the sweetest of women. I would like an antidote for the poison. Do you have something to prevent her from suddenly dropping dead?” Mrs Wise said, “Look, don’t worry. I didn’t give you poison. I prepared a few vitamins and herbs for you to give your mother-in-law and provided the instructions. You see, when you treat someone well, with qualities that you wish them to have, it just happens that they develop those qualities in the course of time.”

To focus on the good

Swami Niranjana sees, appreciates and brings to the surface all the living qualities from within us. He knows of our defects and weaknesses, but he does not focus on them. Unless he feels we need to be corrected he lets them pass. The guru focuses on what is good in us, and in so doing, that goodness expands, and very slowly our defects, limitations, weaknesses and lapses lessen and then disappear.

Satsang, being in the company of truth, for example attending the discourses of the guru, is important to

educate a person in noble thoughts and deeds. Satsang is an excellent opportunity to bring like-minded people together. There is also an element of satsang which is beyond what we hear, for the guru's presence gives us that special lift. Emerson said, "I can't hear what you say, because what you are thunders so loud." Satsang brings out the light in us. Nelson Mandela said, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that frightens us most." Nobility is the knowledge that this light and power are a gift to be used to improve the quality and life of others.

Shun mean-mindedness as dung and poison. Never look into the defects of others. Always appreciate the good qualities of everyone. Be dignified in bearing. Never stoop to ignoble thoughts, words or actions.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Your self is noble and great. You inherit truth and purity. You have within you infinite capacities. You have just to assert who you are.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Nobility represents a high, good and refined character.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

MAGNANIMITY

Synonyms

chivalry	compassion
philanthropy	broad-mindedness
kindness	open heartedness

Antonyms

malevolence	selfishness
unkindness	stinginess
meanness	

Through the noble qualities of the high moral character, and by sacrificing our own interests for the wellbeing and needs of others, we become magnanimous. Magnanimity is nobility in its broadest sense. Magnanimity is an extension of nobility. A magnanimous person knows what to focus on and what to let pass. He does not dwell on insignificant things. There is so much happening in life, we need to be able to recognize what to ignore and what to give attention to.

A magnanimous person is generous, ignores the faults of others and knows how to forgive and forget. They are unaffected by the faults of others, just as the ocean is totally unaffected by the rivers flowing into it. When Swami Satyananda was talking about his life as a guru, he told us, “People and devotees come to me and say, ‘Swamiji, your disciple has taken this and stolen that’, ‘Your disciple is drinking alcohol’, ‘Your disciple was seen at the discotheque the other night’, ‘Your disciple is taking drugs’. All this gossip goes in this ear and out the other, and I pay no attention to it.”

This is magnanimity, for Sri Swamiji would know when to put a stop to improper behaviour and when to let it pass, especially in the event of demeaning a person. Here are three examples of magnanimity and how it can be expressed in different ways.

Master Benzai

A Zen master, Benzai by name, had a group of students. All the students were good, except one boy who was naughty. He used to steal. When the other students found out that he was stealing, they went up to the master and said, “Look, John is stealing. He should be asked to leave the school. Part of the code of conduct of our school is not to steal.” The master paid no attention to the complaints. After some time, the boy stole again. A group of boys got together, made a petition and said to the master, “If you don’t ask him to leave the school, we will all leave.”

The Zen master called the students and said, “You boys know how to behave. You know how to be good. It will not be difficult for you to be accepted by another school and continue with your training, but what about your fellow student? Who will accept him? No one will accept him because he doesn’t yet know the difference between right and wrong. If I don’t teach him, no one is going to teach him and he won’t learn.” The Zen master continued, “Even if all of you leave the school, I will still keep this student here.” This had an influence on them all, particularly the student who was lying and cheating. The good boys became more considerate and kind-hearted. The boy who was stealing never stole again, and became a man of great integrity.

These are acts of magnanimity, where the master can see the deeply hidden qualities beyond the superficial behaviour and attitude on the surface, like lying or cheating. The master can easily whittle these away. Therefore, a magnanimous person is one who is close to the qualities of the soul.

Socrates’ triple filter test

One day, Socrates, a philosopher in ancient Greece, a knower of truth, gave a teaching to one of his disciples. The young man had come running up to him and in his excitement was hardly able to breathe. “Socrates, Socrates, I have some really juicy information to tell you about your friend Dimitri.” Socrates said calmly, “Before you start, I want the information

to pass the triple test.” The disciple eager to gossip replied, “Okay, what is the triple test?” Socrates said, “First of all, tell me, is the information that you are going to impart to me, good?” The disciple said, “No! It’s quite the opposite. It’s all about the . . .” He was going to tell the juicy news, but Socrates stopped him and said, “Wait, wait. We have to pass the second stage of the triple test. Is the information that you are about to tell me true?” The disciple said, “Well, I can’t be absolutely sure about that, because I heard it third-hand, but nevertheless it is very interesting and . . .” Again Socrates stopped him, “Well, now you have to pass the third test: Is the information that you are going to tell me useful to me?” The disciple replied, “Well, no, on the contrary, it won’t be useful to you at all.” To which Socrates said, “Well, you are going to tell me something that is not good, that might not be true and is not going to be useful to me at all. So why tell me?” The disciple lowered his head and went away in shame.

What goes around, comes around

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to eke out a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman’s sparse hut. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. “I want to repay you,” said the nobleman. “You saved my son’s life.” The Scottish farmer, waving off the offer, replied, “No, I can’t accept payment for what I did.”

At that moment, the farmer’s son came to the door of the family hovel. “Is that your son?” the nobleman asked. “Yes,” the farmer replied proudly. “I will make a deal with you. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he will grow to be a man you can be

proud of.” The nobleman took the boy and in time, Farmer Fleming’s son graduated from St. Mary’s Hospital Medical School in London. He became known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin.

Many years later, the nobleman’s son was stricken with pneumonia, and it was penicillin that saved his life. The name of the nobleman was Lord Randolph Churchill, and his son was Sir Winston Churchill.

Always positive

As a magnanimous person, Swami Niranjan does not dwell on little or insignificant events. He has a broad mind and an open heart for all creatures. He laughs, jokes, uplifts and smiles, radiating his light to all. He is totally selfless. These are qualities of magnanimity. He creates an aura around him which everyone responds to and recognizes as magnanimity like Sri Swamiji. Whether Swamiji is in an airport, a hotel lobby or just walking down the street, people don’t know who he is, but still they notice an aura which differentiates him from anyone else. People turn and say, “Who is that?”

Take a broad view of things. Ignore the faults of others. Be great and noble-minded in whatever you do. Avoid silly talk and childish prattle. Let not the mind dwell on little and insignificant things.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

To celebrate your birthday, you have to remember one thing: that you are born as a human being in order to realize the depth and the heights of consciousness, the magnanimity of your soul within yourself.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Magnanimity is generosity and the ability to forgive.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Charity, Generosity and Purity

22nd April 2013

CHARITY

Synonyms

benevolence	endowment
generosity	gifting
the ability to give	helping hand
help	largesse
support	offering
assist	humane
benefaction	tender-hearted
contribution	alms giving
donation	

Antonyms

blockage	greedy
hindrance	self-orientated
impediment	parsimonious
injury	miserly
stealing	tight-fisted
taking	self-centred
inability to give or share	self-seeking

Charity is an outcome of magnanimity. We realize that the wealth, knowledge and spiritual wisdom that we have gained in life is simply being held in trust. It has been

entrusted to us by God and is to be distributed freely. It is the “give, give, give” of Swami Satyananda. It is giving what we have received and achieved in life. Charity needs to be spontaneous and unrestrained, so that giving becomes a habit. We should not resist an impulse to be charitable. The impulse comes, but suddenly the mind may think, “Oh, no, I’ll do it later,” but no, we should act on the spur of the moment. When the charitable impulse comes, give into it for it is coming from a deeper level of the soul.

Charity is looking at the needs of others as if they were our needs. It is extending a helping hand to enable others to find their peace, plenty and prosperity in life. This is the slogan of Rikhiapeeth: peace, plenty and prosperity for the neighbourhood, the villages and the whole world.

The forklift driver

Matel Dawson who lives in Michigan is 78 years old. He has worked as a forklift driver at Ford Motor Co. for 59 years. He could have retired years ago to live comfortably, but instead he chose to continue working twelve-hour days six or seven days a week so that he can donate the money to charity. Dawson says that he does it because he was raised to help others, he likes helping as it gives him sound sleep at night.

Even though Dawson earns up to \$100,000 a year, he lives in a small apartment and drives a beat-up old car, so that he can donate the money he earns to charities. Most of his donations are to scholarship funds, and to date he has donated more than \$1 million.

If we really want to be happy, we need to focus on people we can help, and find ways and means to make a difference in their lives.

Charity means living for others with the feeling that God dwells in all and receives our offerings as worship. It is uplifting others, raising the fallen, bringing solace to the suffering. Charity does not require wealth; it requires a willing and understanding heart. Sri Swamiji used to say that, as soon as a spirit incarnates in the flesh, even as an

avatar, like Christ, Buddha or Sri Rama, there are bound to be lapses. Charity is forgiving lapses and mistakes of others and forgiving those who injure us. Charity can be expressed by feeding and clothing others and disseminating spiritual knowledge where there is a need.

We need to ask ourselves, “What do I have to forgive? What do I have to give up, in order to forgive someone, something, an incident or circumstance in my life? What am I holding on to? Do I have an unforgiving attitude towards certain situations? Are there people in my life that I have not forgiven for hurting, blaming, insulting or abusing me?” We observe the pain and suffering, but we have to understand that to learn from the experience, we have to face it and forgive. Giving and forgiving in all its shapes and colours is charity.

For some people the attitude of charity is easy and comes naturally. It is their nature to give, share and uplift others. For others it doesn't come easily and they need to learn how to be charitable. Being charitable is giving away what we are attached to, not just what we don't want. It is giving something we feel connected to. It is being able to give it to another person who needs it. The ashram is an ideal place to learn to be charitable. In the ashram we are taught to lend a helping hand, to work as a team, to cooperate and to uplift someone with a kind word. There are so many opportunities to develop the charitable state of mind.

Charity is twofold. It is self-orientated when people give large donations in order to have their names on a plaque, be congratulated and publicly recognized. Selfless charity is unseen charity, done silently, without pride or self-glorification. It is when someone does something for the good of another, forgets it and moves on with life. They don't talk about it and no one knows about it, but there is internal recognition, the silent witness in us, watching every motive, thought, word and action that takes place.

Some people believe that charity has the connotation of always doing good, caring for others, smiling and having an uplifting influence; it is this, however, charity has another

connotation. When we act without self-interest, helping or guiding another person it may require a firm hand. For example, if we go out of line we need the guru to reprimand us and put us back on track. The guru may speak to us or he may choose the method of ignoring us.

The guru has many methods to train disciples. There is a laugh and learn method. He might say something publicly as a joke, but for us it has a deeper meaning. We should never react to being corrected as the firmness is guided by love. The guru always has our welfare at heart; he does not want anything from the disciple other than the disciple's ego. The ego is the foundation of the mind. As soon as we can surrender our ego the mind collapses and we experience unity with the self.

Swami Sivananda, who was often nicknamed Swami Givananda, used to say, "In sharing there is joy and peace. Sharing generates cosmic love and destroys greed. Sharing removes selfishness and creates selflessness. Sharing purifies the heart. You will experience the oneness and unity of life. What we are given is given in trust and not for keeping or personal enjoyment." Again and again we hear this message. We have to keep it in mind and be ready to share, when the need arises. This is true spiritual life, the divine life and living yoga.

You are rich

There was a man in Africa who was raising his six children on an income of \$10 a month. Children in his village were going blind due to a disease that could be prevented with medicine that cost only 50 cents. He began to pray asking God to send a rich person to their village to give the money for the medicine, but no one ever came.

As he kept praying, the Lord told him to give the money himself. With six children and only \$10 a month, he didn't see how he could manage this. Eventually, he and his family decided that every month they would buy the medicine to help one child. In seven years he had saved eighty-four children from going blind.

Life-saver

One of Sri Swamiji's well-known sayings is, "I don't want charity from my disciples, I want sacrifice." He and Swami Niranjan exemplify the attitude of charity and total self-sacrifice. They share in abundance whatever they have: their time, knowledge and wisdom, their care, boundless love, and more. A small incident describes such an act.

A few years ago, it was freezing cold in Munger. Of course, coming from Europe, we hadn't come prepared for such cold weather. One day Swami Niranjan presented me, through another swami, with what must have been his best warm-padded jacket which was a life-saver for me. I doubt he had another one for himself, but he gave it regardless seeing the need of another. In this way, he gives without a second thought.

Give, give and give, this is the secret of abundance. Radiate thoughts of goodness and love. Forgive the faults of others. Bless the man that injures you. Share what you have with others. Disseminate spiritual knowledge to one and all. Use the material wealth, knowledge and spiritual wisdom that you possess as a divine trust.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

All property has three destinations: offering, enjoyment, and destruction. We may enjoy it, or we may offer it, otherwise, it will be lost or destroyed. How much do we need for our enjoyment? What we do not need, we must give to those who have nothing. God gives us prosperity so that we may give it to others. He makes us an agent, a medium. He gives us a million dollars and says, "Take your monthly salary and give the rest to others," but we forget and think it is for ourselves, when we are only the trustees.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Charity is helping others to overcome their needs.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

GENEROSITY

Synonyms

altruism	largesse
charity	open-handed
high-mindedness	philanthropy
hospitality	readiness
kindness	

Antonyms

greed	stinginess
selfishness	pettiness

Generosity is similar to charity, as it is its sister virtue. By learning how to give and give more, generosity arises. Generosity is giving without conditions and expectations. It is to be totally liberal and unselfish in our giving. We take delight in giving to others and are no longer stingy and mean. At this stage of our evolution, we are starting to recognize ourselves in others. The pain and suffering of others becomes our own pain and suffering. It is no longer an intellectual concept but an actual feeling.

Bridge to Lanka

When Sri Rama was taking his army across the sea to conquer Ravana, he had asked the trees and the whole animal kingdom, including the monkeys, bears, elephants, tigers, and lions, to come and help him build a bridge from India to Sri Lanka. The elephants were tearing down great tree trunks and throwing them in the water. Other strong animals were bringing large pieces of wood and rocks to build the bridge.

As Sri Rama was watching the bridge being built and slowly progress from the Indian shores towards Sri Lanka, he noticed a little squirrel putting its tail in the sand, running to the water's edge and shaking its tail to drop the sand on the wood of the bridge. It would then run back pick up more

sand with its tail and go back to the bridge to shake out the sand between the big boulders, tree trunks and rocks.

Sri Rama asked the little squirrel, “What are you doing?” The squirrel replied, “Well, you have asked all of us to help build a bridge. I may not be able to carry a tree, but at least I can put some sand on my tail to fill the gaps between the rocks and tree trunks.” Sri Rama was so touched by the squirrel’s actions that he bent down and placed his three fingers along the back of the squirrel, blessing the little animal. It is said that this is why the small Indian squirrels have three stripes down their back.

Copper coin

Mahatma Gandhi perceived and valued generosity in the same manner as Sri Rama. For him it was not the amount of a donation or gift but the feeling, *bhava*, of the person who gave. When he was on a walking tour through India, fundraising for the cause of India’s freedom from British rule, people were donating lakhs of rupees. During one of his tours, an old woman, dressed in rags, withered and worn, tried to approach him. The disciples and volunteers around Gandhi tried to prevent her from coming close. Somehow she managed to get through the bodyguards; she bent down, touched his feet and left a copper coin there.

Gandhi bent down, picked it up and put it in his pocket. His accountant, who happened to be beside him said, “Oh, aren’t you going to give me the copper coin for the fund-raising project?” Gandhi said, “No, I’m going to keep it.” The accountant said, “Why? You trust me with lakhs and crores of rupees but you are not going to give me a copper coin?” Gandhi said, “It is not that I don’t trust you, that old woman has given me more than all the others. The coin is perhaps the only wealth she has and she has given it to me. I want to keep this little copper coin as it has more value to me than the crores of rupees that are coming from people who are giving without this depth of feeling in their heart.”

Prasad – the gift of happiness

There is never a moment when Swami Niranjan is not giving and taking delight in giving. His generosity is legendary. How could he not be generous with the examples of Sri Swamiji and Swami Sivananda, whose whole lives were ‘give, give, give’. During all programs participants receive prasad in copious quantities and often have to buy an extra suitcase for the prasad that they have been given. However, the constant giving happens on many levels: material, physical, mental, social and spiritual. Behind all the giving is the gift of unlimited and unconditional love which finds expression in the many shapes of prasad. Generosity is the teaching of each of the three peeths, be it Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Rikhiapeeth or Sannyasa Peeth.

In whatever you give, be liberal. Have a large heart. Do not be miserly. Take delight in the joy of others, in making them happy. Generosity is a sister virtue of charity and is the fulfilment of charity, magnanimity and nobility.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

If you want to please God, you must be generous to others. You don’t have to go to a temple, church or mosque. You don’t have to become a swami or a yogi. You don’t have to practise asana, pranayama or meditation; just do whatever you can, with your mind, knowledge, influence and might, to relieve the pain of those who are in distress. Find out what people need and take practical steps to help them. We cannot help people by just giving them money. There are other ways we can look after their welfare. Real help means enabling people to generate their own strength and ability.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Generosity is sharing and making others happy.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

PURITY

Synonyms

cleanliness	innocence
immaculate	faultless
stainless	perfection
untainted	wholeness,
virtue	a uniform composition
being chaste	spotlessness

Antonyms

impurity	tainted
defiled	unchaste
polluted	unclean

Giving and being generous purifies the heart and enables the true self that remains hidden within us to find expression. In the New Testament (Matthew 5:8) it says: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

For Swami Sivananda purity is the path to liberation. He describes the process and outcome of purity in the following manner: “Purity is of two kinds: internal and external. Freedom from attraction and repulsion, purity of intentions, purity of motives and purity of feeling constitute internal purity. Purity of the body through bathing, purity of clothing and one’s surroundings, one’s home and its neighbourhood, constitute external purity.

External purity generates pure thoughts. Internal purity makes the mind one-pointed, bestows serenity, cheerfulness, joy, strength, harmony, poise and happiness. It instils love, patience and magnanimity.

If you take pure food, you will have a pure mind. If you have purity of mind, you will remember God. If you always remember God, the knots of the heart – ignorance and desire will be rent asunder and you will attain liberation.”

The grateful sannyasi

Narada, the heavenly messenger, was once going to Heaven to see Vishnu. On the way, he met an old sannyasi seated under a tree and asked him, "I'm going to meet God. Is there any message you would like me to give him?" The old sannyasi replied, "Please ask Him how much longer I shall have to wait for liberation. I have been a sannyasi for the last three births." Narada agreed. He went a little further and found another sannyasi sitting under a tree. Narada asked him, "Well, brother, have you any message for Vishnu? I'm on my way to His abode." He answered, "No, brother. He has given me all that I need. If possible, just convey my gratitude to Him."

When Narada returned and met the old sannyasi, he told him, "Forgive me, brother, but Vishnu said, 'As many leaves as there are on this tree, so many births will you have before attaining liberation.'" The old sannyasi shouted, "What injustice! For three births I have done penances, tortured myself, and still so many births to go! It cannot be!"

Narada then approached the sannyasi under the second tree. "You didn't request it, but I asked Vishnu on your behalf how long it will be before you attain liberation, and He said, 'As many leaves as there are on the tree where he sits, so many births must he take before attaining moksha.'" The sannyasi began dancing. "So soon? How wonderful! How will I express my gratitude to Him?" He was mad with joy and danced round and round the tree, and danced around Narada. The story goes that thus dancing, he attained samadhi.

Dirty washing

Purity is being faultless, without stain or blemish. It is being innocent and seeing everything through the eyes of purity. A newly married couple had moved into a new house. Every morning when they were having breakfast, the wife would say to her husband, as she watched her neighbour hanging out the washing, "Look, Jack, she can't wash very well. I think she needs a new detergent. I don't know what detergent she

uses but the washing on her line is still dirty.” Her husband said nothing. This happened on and off for a few days, until one day, when she was looking out during breakfast with her husband, she saw that the neighbour’s washing was spotlessly clean. She said to her husband, “Look, look! Her washing is so clean. I wonder who taught her how to wash.” Her husband only said, “I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows.” So it is with life. What we see when watching others may depend on the purity of the window through which we look.

Children

Children see through the eyes of purity. Children are free to believe, trust and love without doubt casting its shadow. They love God the same way they know they are being loved.

There was a five year old boy, who had a chat with his dad, “Dad, when I was talking with God, I knew that you would be a good father to me and I knew that mum would be a good mother, and I knew that my sister would be a good sister; that is why I chose this family.” The father was a bit flabbergasted and said, “Really, you were talking with God? What does God look like?” The little boy said, “Really dad, don’t you know? God is just pure light.”

Here are some other quotes from children which show their innocence and purity of heart. A girl, seven years old: “God is a man sitting in the sky. He watches us through a telescope. When the sun sets, he brings out the stars and the moon so that he can see us.” Allie, five years old: “I feel God is in all of us. When we are good, God smiles and when we are bad, God cries. Better to be good at all times. Oh, and yes, don’t waste food.”

A boy, ten years old: “God is an ice-cream. You have to give him all your time and attention. You have to want him all the time, and if you have him, you have to continue to want more of him.”

A boy, four years old, came back from kindergarten and said to his mother, “Mum, it is parents’ day next Saturday

and I want you to come and meet my teacher, Mrs Smith. She is the most beautiful woman, and I love her so much. I just want you to see her and see how lucky I am to have her as a teacher.” Parents’ day came, the mother went to meet Mrs Smith. Mrs Smith was an extremely plain woman, not at all as beautiful or glamorous as the mother was expecting. When she got home with her son, she said to him, “You know, Alex, I met Mrs Smith. She is a lovely, kind woman, but I wouldn’t call her the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.” Alex said to his mother, “But Mum, I was talking about inner beauty.”

We have to become childlike to see the beauty, the inner beauty that children are able to see.

My God

Swami Sivananda is the epitome of all the ITIES, he lived, expressed and manifested them every day. One day he was showing a wealthy devotee around the ashram. The devotee had just spent some rather uncomfortable nights in one of the rooms in the ashram, with a lot of mosquitoes, no mosquito nets and the toilets far away. While Swami Sivananda was showing him around the ashram, he noticed a very attractive looking kutir on a hillock. He said, “Swamiji, that kutir looks very comfortable. That is the type of kutir we should be building for the residents and guests who stay here.” Swami Sivananda said, “Yes, but the money is in your pocket.” The man replied, “Could I have a look at the kutir? I would like to see the inside and see who is being housed there.” Swami Sivananda said, “Of course, let’s go and have a look.”

Inside the kutir an old bull was convalescing. The visitor was shocked as he was expecting to find a VIP residing there. When he saw the bull he could only exclaim, “My God! My God!” Swami Sivananda said, “Yes, exactly.”

Swami Sivananda saw divinity in everything. Seeing divinity in everyone and everything we encounter in life, even if it appears insignificant, whether it is an animal or a

holy person, is a sign of purity. *Atmabhava*, seeing oneness in all, is only possible with a pure heart that is not tainted by self-interest and selfishness.

Be pure at heart. Eradicate lust, anger, and greed. Be pure in your thoughts. Think of God always. Think of the wellbeing of all. Be pure in your words; never utter harsh, unkind words. Be pure in body; keep it clean and healthy. Let the dress and surroundings be clean; observe the rules of physical, moral and spiritual hygiene.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

To err is human; it is willed by the divine force. It yields a fine reward, if only you do not repeat the old mistake. Can you imagine a lotus without mud, a pearl without an oyster? From mistakes comes immense purity.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Purity is the culmination of perfection when all the dimensions of the personality merge into one, and the state of being in complete harmony with oneself and the cosmos is experienced.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

A Quiet Mind

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

You can see the Self only when the mind becomes quiet. Normally the mind is always full of turbulence. What is the mind? How do you explain it? You say it is a thought, an emotion, a feeling, it is knowledge. Oh damn it! Mind is an experience. That's all. It is an experience which you are able to experience, and not Poorna, the dog, nor a donkey, for they have not evolved to that point of experience. In the scale of evolution, they are still below that stage.

We human beings have come to a point of experience where we can experience our mind. Maybe tomorrow you may be able to experience your own Self, but today you are not in the position. The evolution has not gone to the point today that you are able to experience yourself. You are able to experience your emotions. You are able to experience your passions, memory, love and hate, this and that, but you are not able to experience your Self. In order to experience your Self, it is important to calm the mind. However, the mind will not calm down.

It is a most difficult thing. If there is anything that is the most difficult thing in the world, it is to calm the mind. If you are able to calm the mind, you have conquered the whole world. You are fighting with an enemy you don't know. You are fighting with an enemy you have not seen. You are fighting with an enemy you don't know where it is. Therefore, the sages and wise men say, first of all you

should withdraw, you should take away all those things that influence the mind. The mind is influenced by love, hatred, happiness, sorrow, worries and expectations. So many influences affect the mind.

The mind is a very quiet substance, but these influences affect the mind so much. So the mind becomes agitated, and when it becomes agitated you are not able to see yourself. You only see your passions, your fears, your sorrows, but you don't see yourself. Vedanta has come to one definite conclusion. Witness the mind. Watch the mind. Don't interfere. Be impartial. Remain impartial. The mind is thinking of fear, the mind is thinking of envy, the mind is thinking of jealousy, the mind is thinking of happiness, the mind is thinking of many things. Alright, let it, but don't be affected by it. Just be a spectator of the match, just as you go to the cinema house and see what's happening there on the screen. If you interfere with the mind, you can't help it, but when you watch the mind, it sits down quietly.

Ultimately, the Self, *jivatma*, individual soul, *Paramatma*, Supreme Soul, and the soul, the body and the mind are one substance, not two. There is only one substance, not two. From



that one substance, two has come and three has come and four has come. The ultimate theory and philosophy in India is: either everything is evolved from one and goes back to one, or everything evolves from zero and goes back to zero.

Frankly speaking, teaching and preaching is not my nature. My nature is just to sit down quietly and let the mind roam wherever it goes for he is my friend, he is my companion, he is everything to me. He is always with me. He is a rascal and a good companion. He can dream, he can inspire, he can feel passions, he can feel jealousy. He is a child, a brother, a friend. I live with him and he has never caused a problem for me, for I have already accepted him as he is. I have adjusted to my mind and so I have no problem with him. Whatever it does, be it mischief or anything else, I say, ok very nice.

Sri Krishna did the same thing. He used to do a lot of mischief and was the most naughty boy. So my mind thinks of passions, ok, no problem. What can I do? He lives with me, I can't fight with him, I don't want to fight with him for I don't want to be in a wrong relationship with him. I don't want to have a wrong relationship with the man who



lives with me all the time. You get my point? I mean you may have a wrong relationship with a person, who comes to you off and on, but a fellow who lives with you, sleeps with you in your bed and I am fighting with him day and night? Damn it, I am not going to do it. My mind is my friend, then and now.

When I was working for my Guru, he told me to teach yoga and I did it. In 1988 I said, “Salam,” and I left the ashram. I came here and lived in Gauri Ganesh. All alone, all day long, no problem. I have three storeys, sometimes I go up, sometimes I go down, I go up and down. I have nothing to do, I don’t read the *Ramayana*, I don’t read the *Gita*, I don’t read the Bible, I don’t write spiritual books, I don’t write secular literature – nothing. I just sit down and my mind also sits down by my side and he asks me, “Swamiji, shall I think like this?” I say, “Do it.” He asks, “Shall I go out with Swami Sivamurti?” I say, “Go. No problem.” You can think anything. What is there? The mind is you. It is you who is the mind. It is the mind which is you and you are fighting with yourself. You are all schizophrenic. I am not schizophrenic, for I am not fighting with myself. I am at peace with myself.

I give these talks here and there not to teach you, for it is not my dharma, it is not my nature, it is not my swabhava, nothing. Everybody has come with his own destiny. Mango will become a mango. Even if you punch it, it will never become an apricot. Does it matter? Lemon will always grow lemon, it will not become mango, even if you inject something in it. You have a destiny. I have a destiny. Therefore, be at home with yourself! Be at home with yourself! Sometimes there are mental problems, say ok. The boy does mischief like my dog, Poorna. When he does mischief, I say, “Sit down, quiet.”

—2008 Rikhiapeth, Jharkhand, India

Pratyahara Stages 1 to 3

23rd April 2013

PRATYAHARA

Pratyahara is the fifth step in Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga and is generally translated as 'sense withdrawal', but this is a limited definition of pratyahara. Pratyahara is the threshold between the outer and inner world of the mind, between the yamas, niyamas, asana and pranayama of *bahiranga yoga*, external yoga, and dharana, dhyana and samadhi of *antaranga yoga*, internal yoga.

The etymology of pratyahara gives us a clue to its meaning. 'Pratya' comes from the word *pratyaya* which means 'the contents of the mind', and *ahara* means 'food or nourishment'. Another definition of pratyahara is derived from two Sanskrit words, prati and ahara with *ahara* meaning 'food or anything taken into ourselves that nourishes ourselves', and *prati*, a preposition meaning 'away or against'. Together the two words mean 'weaning away from ahara' or 'withdrawing from ahara or withdrawing from that which nourishes us'.

Swami Niranjanananda says that pratyahara is the most difficult state to enter. After pratyahara, it is much easier to enter *dharana*, the concentrated, focused state, or *dhyana*, the meditative state. To attain the state of pratyahara requires effort. Swami Niranjan says, "Once we are able to gain mastery in pratyahara, we can do many things with

our mind. The mind becomes awakened, and the awakened mind is a fantastic and beautiful thing to have.”

Why do we need pratyahara? How do mental problems develop and how does pratyahara help? The major reason for our mental and emotional imbalances, according to yoga, is attachment. When we become attached to a person or object it gives rise to expectations and desires. Expectations and desires ultimately make us victims of frustration, leading to tension and conflict, and due to this, the ego feels insecure.

To deal with this insecurity, the ego calls upon the unconscious mechanism of repression. Repression slowly takes the conscious conflicts that we face and moves them into the subconscious and eventually the unconscious mind. Repression occurs when we do not take the time to mull over these conflicts, reactions and difficulties that we face.

Antar darshan is one of the best techniques to enable us to integrate and digest any type of reaction, conflict, anxiety or difficulty, either as soon as it happens or in the evening before going to sleep. We use antar darshan to become aware of emotions and emotional reactions, whereas, we use antar mouna to become aware of thoughts. Antar darshan deals with the everyday emotional reactions, not the deep traumas that we carry. For facing and managing deep-rooted traumas we use hridayakasha dharana, a technique which follows on from antar darshan.

When a conscious conflict is not dealt with, it is pushed into the subconscious and unconscious mind, it seems that it is forgotten, but the mind never forgets anything. Every experience forms *samskaras*, impressions, and acts below the surface, in ways unknown to us. It causes us to suddenly react or behave in a way that is inconsistent with our personality and character. Samskaras come up to the surface and hit us when we least expect it. Therefore, we have to learn how to always be ready to deal with them.

If it is a serious unresolved reaction or problem it can turn into a mental or physical illness. When we repress

conflict, the conscious mind becomes peaceful and we appear to be serene and calm, but this is only a surface expression. Deep down there is a lot happening and there is no calmness. If you haven't worked out the daily interactions there will be tension, anxiety, stress and turbulence in the deeper levels of the mind.

Repressed conflicts and tensions remain active in the unconscious mind and become a part of our shadow. They are events and experiences that we have denied, ignored and pushed away. They manifest as mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, phobia and hostility. If the impressions go deeper into the unconscious mind, they express as different forms of psychosis, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Neurosis is usually connected with the subconscious mind, whereas psychosis is more deeply embedded and connected with the unconscious mind. The techniques of tantra are better suited to helping with psychotic problems, whereas yoga deals well with problems of the subconscious mind, the neuroses, complexes and inhibitions.

Pratyahara encourages us to make friends with the mind through awareness. Awareness carries with it dispassion and the witnessing faculty. The deeper our awareness, the less attached and the more dispassionate we are, the less involved we are with anything going on externally or internally. Witnessing, being impartial to the normal functions and activities that are going on around us, provides a distance. It gives us the space and thus the ability to view events with greater clarity. Awareness enables us to have greater control over our reactions and responses.

In pratyahara we are on the threshold. As we witness simultaneously external and internal events, we gain deeper insight into the mind. The mind is given time to reflect, integrate information and release emotions created through daily interactions.

THE MIND



Let us consider the concept of the mind as an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg is the conscious mind, the mind we interact with on a daily basis. When working with awareness, first we see the area of the conscious mind. We learn to be aware of what is happening around us and what our reactions are.

If we were standing on the iceberg at the water line, and looked down into the sea, we could see the iceberg for a short distance. Beyond that the water becomes too deep to see the rest of the iceberg. The area that we see below the water line is likened to the subconscious mind, which is still only a small part of the iceberg.

The subconscious mind is the part of the mind that contains all the information from the time we were in our mother's womb until the present moment. It is like a recorder where everything is being recorded. Consciously we may forget something, but the subconscious mind never forgets. It is the part of the mind that controls the organs and the systems of the body. It makes sure that everything is working as it should. If we don't resolve our daily conflicts, emotional reactions and responses, it means that we are pushing them into the subconscious mind. This creates a lot of tension. This tension does not allow the subconscious mind to take care of the bodily functions as it should. In the course of time, the organs and systems of the body go out of synchronization and we fall ill physically or mentally. The subconscious mind is the area responsible for our basic instincts of procreation, self-preservation, hunger and fear.

The deeper aspect of the mind, the vast mass of the iceberg, is related to the unconscious mind. It is the invisible, unconscious mass that is moving the iceberg through the water. In our daily interactions, without being aware of it, we are being motivated, controlled and directed by what is lying in the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is said to contain a complete record of our evolutionary past and projected future, according to our karmas to date. Of course, the past is solidified and has happened. How we handle today determines the shifting and the adjusting of the karmas in the unconscious mind. We cannot tell the future, because the way we respond or act in any given situation in the present changes all the time. The unconscious mass of the mind is in constant fluctuation. It is not fixed, it can be changed.

We have some control over our destiny, depending on how we react and respond to the present moment. With awareness we can choose to perceive the present moment as a threat, a lesson to learn or something friendly. With this choice we can change the way we perceive the present moment and re-program the mind.

As we deepen our awareness, our intelligence expands. Intelligence and awareness are intimately connected. The more aware we are, the more intelligent we become, as we connect with the innate intelligence of the soul, the conscience, the self. The greater our awareness, the more we are connected to that innate intelligence within us, and the more we are able to express it.

Finally, the superconscious state of the mind is the totality of the mind. When we become aware of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind, we have reached what is called the superconscious state. In our current state of consciousness, the dark room is the mind and we can shine the torch on the conscious mind. The area around the bright light coming from the torch is the subconscious mind for we can see a little of it. The rest of the room which is in darkness is the unconscious mind. However, as we expand our awareness and the light of the torch, we see and understand more about ourselves. We begin to understand our programming, why we do the things we do and why we are as we are. To the same degree that we understand our own minds, understanding of other people's minds dawns.

The self expresses itself through the mind. The mind expresses itself through the brain. The brain expresses itself through the senses.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Pratyahara is not just one practice. It is a process of different practices. It is a series of practices which enable the mind to internalize at will and eventually to be aware of what is simultaneously taking place either internally, within the reactions of the mind upon receiving information through, any of the five senses, or externally, in the world around us.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

For Swami Niranjan the greatest quality of a human being is understanding. When we really understand, we do not need any explanations. We understand why something is happening to people or why they are like they are. It is due to their mental programming from childhood or a previous lifetime.

In the same way that we can erase a computer program or change the software, we can erase or change the software in our mind. We are not the mind and the mind is not us. We are the witness of the mind. Due to our attachment to the mind, we are involved in it and identify with fear, greed, jealousy or passion. We think that we are this programming, but with growing awareness we understand that we are not. It is just a program playing in the mind and we start to witness it as such.

The mind is like a naughty child, we let it do what it wants to do, but we should identify with the witnessing principle, *drashta*. The *drashta* is something deep, it is a greater intelligence, love, truth, a greater wisdom which gives us the understanding to accept life as it is.

The play of the senses

The senses provide the link between the inner and outer world. The mind takes food in the form of experiences and information through the five senses. What we know today we have learnt through the five senses. The mind is fed through sensorial impressions. Pratyahara is a state of mind that deprives the mind from receiving nourishment from these senses.

The following table contains examples of interactions between sense organs, objects and mental reactions.

Sense	Organ	Object	Mental Reaction
Sight	Eyes	Cake	Anticipation
Hearing	Ears	Loud crash	Shock, alertness or curiosity
Touch	Skin	Summer breeze	Pleasant and soothing
Smell	Nose	Perfume	Memories or sentiments
Taste	Tongue	Bitter	Suspicion or alertness

Pratyahara is weaning the mind away from these external objects which nourish the senses and form attachment. As the mind withdraws from the objects perceived through the senses, the senses follow the mind inward, away from the objects that nourish and feed them. In other words, the senses become introverted, they imitate the mind and return to the *pratyaya*, the contents of the mind, from which they arose.

Sage Patanjali's definition of pratyahara (2:54) is:

Pratyahara is, as it were, the imitation by the senses of the mind, by withdrawing them from their respective objects. When the mind becomes introverted, as it does when we go to sleep, the senses imitate the mind. When we are asleep we do not hear, smell, feel or taste what is going on around us because the senses are introverted having followed the mind. It is here that the real evolution of the mind takes place. Rather than receiving nourishment and information from the senses, the mind starts to receive it from the soul, the self, the consciousness within. From this point, real wisdom, understanding and knowledge dawns.

The turtle with its two arms, two legs, and one little tail represents the five senses. Just as the turtle can extend and withdraw its tail and limbs, a yogi can extend the five senses outwards to experience the external environment and withdraw the senses inwards to experience the inner world.

Under normal circumstances, the senses are the masters rather than the servants. The senses entice us to develop desires for all sorts of things. When our minds are extroverted, the senses are controlling the mind. When we see the cake, we want it. When we hear about a beautiful island in Tahiti with deep, crystal clear waters, we want to be there and swim. Swami Niranjan says that the mind is just desires; if we can take the desires out of the mind, the mind collapses. In pratyahara we put the senses in their proper place which is under the control of the mind. The mind

is aware of the sensorial cravings, the desire for cake, the desire to go to Tahiti, the desire to have a relationship with a particular person. The desire is there, but as we have created space through awareness, there is distance between us and the desire. It gives us control and quietens the mind.

There is so much going on in the mind, including fear, greed, anxiety, guilt. However, the human mind has evolved to the point where it can experience and recognize jealousy or anger. I know when I am angry. I know when I am jealous, upset or worried. Animals have not evolved to this point, they just have the experience. There are thousands of different emotions which we can recognize and name. Some of them we cannot name, but we feel them and are able to witness them. However, the mind is not evolved to the point where it can experience the self, the state of consciousness beyond the mind. For that we have to quieten the mind and make it as still as a lake.

Pratyahara is a state of internalization where we develop the ability to simply witness the input from the senses and the resulting reactions in the mind. A person in the state of pratyahara will never complain of mental distractions. As he is the witness, he can sit at a crossroad of a busy city to meditate, nothing disturbs him.

PRATYAHARA STAGES 1 TO 3

Stage 1 of pratyahara

Stage 1 of pratyahara is becoming aware of what is happening externally and how we react internally upon receiving information through any of the five senses. In Stage 1 of pratyahara the senses are fully externalized while we are experiencing their activity, and simultaneously, we are aware of any internal reactions we have to the sensory experience. For example, we hear a sound externally and it makes us feel comfortable or uncomfortable.

The techniques to practise and develop Stage 1 of pratyahara are antar mouna Stages 1 and 2. Antar mouna

can be done as a meditation practice or as a twenty-four-hour practice. The beauty of antar mouna is that we can practise it at any moment of the day, no matter what we are doing.

Stage 2 of pratyahara

Stage 2 of pratyahara is maintaining external equilibrium. When we become established in Stage 1 and the awareness deepens, we can begin to maintain external equilibrium while experiencing the internal reactions caused by the influence of the senses.

For example, we hear a sound which makes us feel comfortable or uncomfortable. When we are practising Stage 2, we hear the sound, we feel the discomfort or comfort, however, we do not reveal what we are thinking or feeling through any expression, speech or body language. We make an effort to maintain equilibrium externally. If we want to, of course, we can, we have the choice. Pratyahara can help us in this way. At times in life when we are feeling shocked or embarrassed but don't want to show our feelings, with Stage 2 we have control and are able to maintain external equilibrium.

As long as we maintain awareness, we are not suppressing anything. Awareness is the safety valve. Pratyahara is awareness and awareness is pratyahara. We are aware that we feel embarrassed and we are aware that we are making the effort not to show our embarrassment or hurt. We are aware of what we are doing, thereby we prevent suppression. The ability to witness gives us a choice of how to respond and behave. In pratyahara Stage 2, we are choosing to respond by not showing our feelings.

There is a big difference between knowing and experiencing something. An indication that we are developing awareness is our sense of impartiality. If we don't feel detachment, we are not ready to enter Stage 2 of pratyahara, as we still might want to show a reaction. If we feel that we cannot control but will suppress the reaction, then we should express it. However, with practice of the techniques

of pratyahara there will come a time when we will have the control and the freedom of choice to maintain equilibrium externally, which is Stage 2 of pratyahara.

Awareness means we know that we know. Awareness in yoga is saying, “I know that I know that this is a watch.” We are connecting with that which is witnessing inside us. It gives us the experience of being separate from the reaction in the mind. This connection enables us to exercise control, if we want to. There may be times when we don’t want to maintain equilibrium, when we want to express, in no uncertain terms, what we are feeling but we need to be aware of that and the consequences of behaving in that way.

We have our moments, our ups and downs. Only practice is required to develop awareness, control and balance in expression. We have the examples of our gurus and people who have managed to face insult and maintain their cool. There are times when we do not want to show another person what we are going through. It is private and personal. Every day something happens and it is difficult to maintain our cool and calm. The ITIES are exercises in which we try our skills, like a child crawling, trying to stand up to take its first steps. It falls many times, but it keeps on trying on those shaky little legs. It stands up and tries again until after some time, the child is walking. This is like us. We are babies in pratyahara. Many times we will fail. It is no disgrace, but it is important to make the effort. Success is not always seen in the result, success lies in the effort we make. We may not succeed in maintaining equilibrium, but we will succeed in the effort we are making to develop Stage 2 of pratyahara.

Stage 3 of pratyahara

In Stage 3 of pratyahara we recognize the deeper mental processes associated with the senses, how they trigger deeply embedded memories and bring various mental and emotional reactions to the surface. This we also experience in the process of antar mouna Stage 4.

In antar mouna Stage 4 we select problematic thoughts or thoughts that we would prefer not to think. We allow them to sink into the mind and thereby dislodge certain *samskaras* or impressions that are deeply embedded. We put a thought or an experience that we prefer not to remember onto the end of our fishing line and throw it into the water and let it sink deep. Sooner or later, an unsuspecting fish or samskara will catch that thought. The unpleasant thought or the thought we don't want to think about is connected with something that is lying in the deeper recesses of the mind. So we dislodge it, we give it a bit of a pull with the fishing line and it comes to the surface. Stage 3 of pratyahara is like that.

In each of the progressive stages of pratyahara our awareness is becoming deeper and deeper. We are increasingly able to recognize the deeper mental processes associated with the senses. When we cast the line and catch the long-forgotten samskara the memory is triggered, it comes to the surface and we witness it. This is Stage 3 of pratyahara. Through this stage, we see what is lying deep in the mind, creating behaviour patterns today that we were not aware of.

Here is a simple example: A parent says to a child, "You will amount to nothing, and you will never succeed. Your brother will succeed; your sister will succeed, but you? There is no hope for you. No matter what you do, you'll be a failure in life." A child, two or three years old, hears it and forgets it. Children don't know how to process these words, therefore, they sink into the mind and go deep.

The process of experiences sinking into the mind happens especially with these 'killer statements', as they are called in psychology. If we were fed killer statements as a young child, they have sunk down deep into the mind and become part of the shadow. We are not aware of them anymore. We do not remember why we feel insecure or lack confidence. We just know the feeling that, "No matter what I do, I am not going to succeed. I am not a worthwhile

person. I will never live up to other people's expectations, or my own."

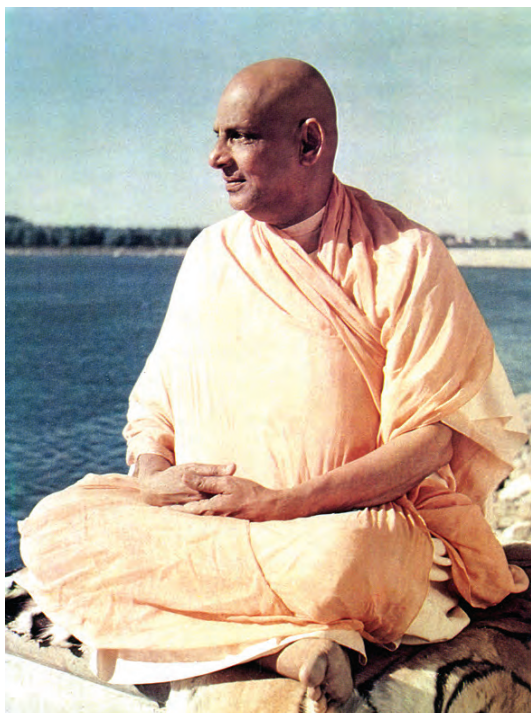
This kind of mental programming colours everything we do. It colours our relationships, our interactions with other people and our behaviour. In Stage 3 of pratyahara we become aware of it. Suddenly it clicks somewhere in our mind and we re-experience what happened. Once we witness that childhood experience as an adult it begins to be released.

Here is another example of a wonderful woman and a yoga teacher. She was terrified of the sea but her husband loved it. They bought a house by the sea. Everyday, when she took the dog for a walk, she would put up her hand to shield her eyes from the sight of the sea. Her fear of the sea was something she had learnt to live with. One day, in yoga nidra one of the images given triggered off a memory in the subconscious mind. The memory brought back images of when she was about two years old and playing on the beach. As she was playing in the waves, a large wave came and pushed her under. She started to take in water and felt great fear and darkness. In the state of yoga nidra she witnessed the fear and her father rushing to pick her up, take her in his arms and comfort her. She experienced the situation again, but with distance and the perspective of awareness. The next day, when she went outside, she didn't have to cover her eyes to avoid looking at the sea. The fear of the sea, a fear of thirty years, had gone.

We carry experiences within us that we are not aware of. We are only aware of the effects they have on our behaviour. Swami Niranjan says that we need to discover these underlying experiences and work with them, only then can a real healing process take place. In Greece, womens' groups work with the spirit of trying to discover the underlying sentiment that colours everything and every situation the women find themselves in. One woman discovered that the underlying sentiment that overshadowed everything in her life was rejection. She said, "No matter where I go, what I

do, whom I meet, I fear rejection. Whether it is a social party, an application for a new job or a new relationship, always in the periphery of my mind is fear of rejection.” When she discovered this, it was a great breakthrough for her. She understood that this had been in her mind and it had come to the surface. The rejection had come from her parents when she was a child. Maybe the parents didn’t reject her, but she had felt rejected by them and that program went into the mind.

Stage 3 of pratyahara is fishing for the root cause, the root experience, the samskara that is the base of our behaviour. Only with the knowledge of the cause of our behaviour are we able to change and modify the program and pattern.



Pratyahara Stages 4 and 5 and the ITIES

24th April 2013

PRATYAHARA

In Stage 3 of pratyahara, we went fishing for deep-rooted impressions that influence our day-to-day behaviour. We cast the line to catch the *samskara* from the past. From here we move into Stage 4 which allows us to recognize and balance our reactions, so we become immune to what is occurring in our minds.

Stage 4 of pratyahara

It is a wonderful stage of pratyahara as immunity is the keyword for this stage. We develop immunity to what people say and do, to life's circumstances. As we develop immunity towards them, their effects on us lessen. The greater the depth of our awareness is in this stage, the more immunity we gain and are able to maintain.

Stage 5 of pratyahara

In Stage 5 the awareness eventually deepens to the point where we experience *shoonya*, nothingness or void. It is like Stage 5 of *antar mouna*, where we develop the state of thoughtlessness or nothingness, the void. When we gain control over the unconscious actions and reactions between the senses and the mind, we are able to stop the interaction.

As we enter each stage of pratyahara progressively, we are naturally becoming more and more relaxed. The beta rhythm of the brain is changing to alpha, maybe even theta or delta. Therefore, in that relaxed state, one of the obstacles is sleepiness and one of the challenges is to stay awake. We keep the mind blank and remain alert, we do not fall asleep.

The mental vacuum arises spontaneously as a result of mastery over the previous stages. Shoonya is only a transition from one state of awareness to another. From this state, we are ready to enter into the stages beyond pratyahara, into *dharana* or concentration.

Summary of pratyahara 1 to 5

Stage 1: We develop awareness of what is happening externally, the sense that is receiving the information and the internal mental reaction.

Stage 2: We make the effort to maintain the external equilibrium in spite of what we sense externally and what we feel inside. We don't show our internal reaction through facial expression, body language or any other way.

Stage 3: We connect with the underlying deep-rooted processes in the mind that trigger memories. When we receive information from the senses, we see the connection with a memory, which may or may not be related to the present incident.

Stage 4: We develop immunity to the information received by the senses and the internal reaction. It does not affect us or have any power over us any longer. Whether people criticize us, praise us or blame us, we are immune to it.

Stage 5: The awareness deepens to the point where we spontaneously experience shoonya.

Towards meditation

Pratyahara can be practised throughout the day, but it is also a major component of meditation. Pratyahara starts with awareness, one cannot move into *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*, unless pratyahara is achieved. *Dharana* is a focused,

concentrated state of mind. It is often compared to the light coming from a light bulb and being focused to become a laser beam. In the same way, the mind in dharana becomes so focused on the object of meditation that it doesn't allow any thoughts, emotions or activities of the mind to interfere. Just as the laser beam can cut through steel or burn a sensitive part of the body without damaging any other part, so, the focused energy of the mind in dharana gives us the capacity to do almost anything. It is a powerful state of mind.

In dharana we concentrate on an object, close the eyes and easily visualize the image of the object in chidakasha. The concentration is deep, but there are breaks in the concentration. We maintain dharana for a period of time, until it breaks and we lose the stream of concentration. Then we start the practice again, refocus and enter into dharana. Dharana is a practice and a process.

When we enter into the state of *dhyana*, we maintain an uninterrupted stream of awareness. When the observer, the process of observing, and the object being observed, all merge in such a way that only the object remains, it brings us to the stages of *samadhi*. In samadhi the essence of what we are focusing on reveals itself to us.

A guru just looks at us, enters into the state of dhyana and our essence is revealed to him. We don't have to say anything in the presence of the master. When he is in that state and looking at us, we may not notice any change in his expression, but whatever we are going through is revealed to him. Sometimes he gives us the solutions or a hint, sometimes he doesn't and we have to work it out for ourselves.

These are advanced states of the mind. They are not easy to enter and require a lot of practice. However, we cannot enter into these states unless we master pratyahara. For pratyahara we need both, practice, *abhyasa*, and process, *prakriya*.

We can practise the techniques or stages of pratyahara by sitting quietly for some time, withdrawing the sensory

awareness and maintaining the witnessing attitude. This is what we do in the pratyahara techniques, such as ajapa japa, yoga nidra, antar mouna and antar darshan.

Pratyahara, however, is also a process which can be maintained all the time. In daily life, when we have the knack of deepening our awareness to enter one of the stages, we can maintain it even in the midst of activity. Whether we are in the office, cooking, serving lunch, or talking to someone, we can enter into a state of pratyahara. For example, we can become aware of a smell and our reaction as we walk along the street, we can be aware of the effort we make not to show our feelings, or we can be immune to what is happening. Pratyahara gives us the choice.

Practice of the five stages of pratyahara

Internalization: Please take a comfortable meditative position, or if you prefer you may lie down; whatever makes you feel relaxed. Adjust your position until you find what is most suitable for you. Become aware of your environment, the other people in the room, the sounds you can hear around you, the different feelings and sensations in the body. Take your awareness to the different parts of your body to ensure that each part is relaxed and that there is no tension or awkwardness. If you find awkwardness or tension, relax that part of the body by moving it or mentally relax it using the power of the mind. What is important is that you find a position that is comfortable for you, so that you can follow the practice easily and don't have to be concerned about the body at all.

Then bring your awareness to the natural and spontaneous rhythm of the breath. Be aware of each inhalation and exhalation, in and out, in a constant, rhythmic movement. Natural and spontaneous, without any effort on your part, just establish the natural rhythm, and be aware of how and where you are breathing. Are you breathing through the nostrils or the mouth, is your breathing deep or shallow, slow or fast, is the rhythm

of breathing irregular or regular? Be aware of how and where the body is breathing and also of the intimate connection between the mind and the breath. Slow, deep breathing calms the mind, whereas shallow, fast breathing agitates the mind.

Once you have established a natural, spontaneous rhythm, you can slowly start to influence your breath by elongating it, encouraging the breath to become slower and deeper, as slow and deep as you comfortably can without strain, without effort. Slow, deep breathing, and if you are familiar with ujjayi pranayama, adjust your breathing to ujjayi pranayama now. If not, just continue with your natural breath, but encourage it to be as slow and deep as possible. Your awareness is on each and every breath. Do not allow one breath to pass without your awareness of it. If you find your awareness wandering away to something else, as soon as you realize that bring it back to the breath, back to each inhalation and each exhalation. Slow and deep and steady.

Stage I: Then, with your next inhalation, lift your awareness into *chidakasha*, into the space of consciousness before or around your closed eyes. Visualize the space of chidakasha, the area where the subconscious and unconscious mind manifest for our conscious awareness. Focus your attention and your awareness in chidakasha and become aware of any recent incident or incidents of the past. For example, someone was talking to you. It doesn't matter where you have heard something. You realize that you have used the ears as an instrument to hear a sound or to hear someone saying something to you. Be aware of your internal reaction. This is Stage 1 of pratyahara. Recall hearing something that was said to you and your reaction, imagine it and if possible visualize it. Go through the experience. Re-live the experience. Re-live your reaction. The same thing may happen again today and you may not act in the same way, but for the sake of the exercise you are recalling

something that was said to you, and your response in the mind. You have simultaneous awareness of what was said and what type of reaction took place in your mind. This is Stage 1 of pratyahara.

Stage 2: Then entering Stage 2 of pratyahara, take the same incident if possible, if not, choose another one, where you heard something and reacted. No matter what was said, were you able to maintain mental equilibrium, even if in appearance only? If not, remember that you were not able to maintain external equilibrium at that moment and imagine the same situation happening again, where you enact the whole scene and this time you maintain external equilibrium, regardless of what is said to you. The other people observing you cannot see through any reaction, facial expression or any form of body language, what is actually going on in your mind, what reaction is taking place. Externally your expression has not changed. Imagine it. Visualize it.

Stage 3: Little by little, as your awareness deepens, you enter Stage 3 of pratyahara. The awareness is deepening, enabling you to recognize deeper mental processes associated with what you heard. How did what you hear trigger deeply embedded memories and bring various mental and emotional reactions to the surface? You can use the same example or imagine an example, where what you heard triggered something from your early childhood, something that hurt you in the past or influenced you in a negative way.

What memories relating to your childhood or early life were triggered by what you heard? What was the connection between what you heard and the deeply embedded memories in your mind? Can you recognize it? Can you find out and discover by expanding your awareness, how something that was said to you and affected you in the present, was actually a result of what had happened in the past, triggered by a deeply embedded memory? This is Stage 3 of pratyahara.

Stage 4: As your awareness deepens, expands and grows you enter Stage 4 of pratyahara. You find that no matter what you have heard, the thing that hurt, wounded or influenced you, still influences your behaviour today. Recognize the experience and the reactions coming from the experience.

Imagine yourself being totally immune to what was said externally and totally immune internally. You might be aware of a trace of a reaction, but the reaction is not strong enough to influence you in any way. You are immune to what has been said or what has been done. You feel protected. You feel immunity. People cannot hurt you as they could hurt you before. What previously upset you in an earlier stage of pratyahara has no power to upset or hurt you now. You have developed immunity, internally and externally, to the world around you and not only in appearance.

You have developed an internal immunity and protection. Imagine it. Visualize it. If you have experienced it, re-live the experience. If you have not experienced it, imagine how it would be. Use your power of imagination. Imagine how you are being immune to what is being said to you. Visualize yourself being immune to that. The power of visualization is great, and the more often you use it, the deeper this type of programming goes into your mind.

Stage 5: Eventually you enter Stage 5 of pratyahara. The awareness deepens to a point where you experience shoonya, nothingness or void. There is thoughtlessness, and if any thought comes, you just say, "Let this be my only thought, for I have no thoughts." In Stage 5 of antar mouna, you gain control over the unconscious actions and reactions between the senses and the mind. You stop the interaction so that shoonya takes place. The mind becomes blank, while you watch with alertness. You are aware, you are alert. You do not allow yourself to fall asleep. You just allow yourself to enter that mental

vacuum that arises spontaneously as a result of mastery over the previous stages.

This stage of shoonya is only a transition. It is the last stage of pratyahara. It is the transition stage from the state of pratyahara to the state of dharana. When you experience shoonya, the void and emptiness, it is time to bring in your meditation symbol. When you can visualize it clearly, focus your concentration on it and enter the state of dharana, you will be beyond pratyahara. This indicates that you have succeeded in the process of pratyahara. You have succeeded in passing through the five stages of pratyahara.

Externalization: Then relax your efforts. Relax your efforts and be aware of the space of consciousness in front of you in chidakasha. It is a warm, inviting, velvety soft and encouraging space. Just be aware of the space of consciousness of chidakasha. Then gradually externalize your awareness. Become aware of the sounds around you, the environment around you, the people seated around you. Become aware of the feelings in the body, the coolness of the room, the way you are seated, whether you are feeling comfortable or not. Gradually externalize your awareness to the point when you feel ready to gently open your eyes and relax your position.

Hari Om Tat Sat

This is an example of how one can practise the five stages of pratyahara. We may or may not be able to enter all stages. It is an example of how to use the stages as a meditation practice or process during the day.

To practise during daily activities, we can choose one stage of pratyahara to focus on, maybe on immunity. We try to be immune to whatever happens. Whatever we see, whatever we hear, whatever we touch, whatever we smell, whatever we taste, we practise immunity and see how it works. If we react, we observe the reactions and remember immunity.

Swami Niranjan was once asked, “What is one of the great benefits of ashram life?” He answered simply, “It develops immunity.” In the ashram we face our reactions and reactions from other people. This is tiring and taxing on the mind, but if we enter pratyahara we have a lot more energy. Swami Niranjan gives a personal discipline for the ashram, “Don’t react.” As soon as we feel a reaction to what has happened on the tip of the tongue, we remember to pause and choose our course of action rather than automatically react. Otherwise one reaction leads to another, and another, making an endless chain. We can stop that chain of reactions if we pause and make a conscious choice of how to act. That choice decides our destiny, our future, therefore it is an important choice that we can make every moment of every day.

PRATYAHARA AND THE 18 ITIES

Relating the ITIES to the stages of pratyahara contributes enormously to their practice. The reverse is also true: working with the ITIES contributes to the achievement of the various stages of pratyahara. If we take a closer look at the ITIES, we can see that certain ITIES play a greater role in developing certain stages of pratyahara and vice versa. Here is an overview of the ITIES in relation to the pratyahara stages:

Pratyahara	Related ITIES
Stage 1	1. Serenity, 2. Regularity, 3. Absence of vanity
Stage 2	4. Sincerity, 5. Simplicity, 6. Veracity, 7. Equanimity, 8. Fixity, 9. Non-irritability
Stage 3	7. Equanimity, 8. Fixity, 9. Non-irritability, 10. Adaptability, 11. Humility, 12. Tenacity
Stage 4	13. Integrity, 14. Nobility, 15. Magnanimity
Stage 5	16. Charity, 17. Generosity, 18. Purity

Each consecutive stage of pratyahara incorporates all the previous stages. If we are working with Stage 4 of pratyahara, we naturally assume that we are also working with Stages 1, 2 and 3.

To support the deepening of pratyahara and the experience of the ITIES in daily life it is helpful to compliment the ongoing effort with structured practices. There are particular Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga pratyahara practices that will support the practise of each ITY.

Following is an outline of the relationship between the ITY and the stage of pratyahara along with recommended Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga practices.

Serenity and Stage 1 of pratyahara

How does serenity develop Stage 1 of pratyahara?

- Serenity creates a substratum on which we can work and build a practice.
- Serenity quietyens the mind which makes it easier to be the witness, the *drashta*.
- Serenity carries within it the quality of detachment, which implies disassociation from the object of observation. This is a prerequisite for all stages of pratyahara.
- Serenity enables us to be aware of what is happening externally, and how we react internally for we are in that serene state of mind.

How does Stage 1 of pratyahara develop serenity?

Pratyahara develops awareness, which brings about detachment, which in turn initiates the experience of serenity. The ensuing feeling of serenity assists us in witnessing what is happening externally and how we react internally. In a state of anxiety or inner turmoil we cannot be the *drashta*, the witness.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar mouna Stages 1 and 2
- Antar darshan Stages 1 to 3.

Regularity and Stage 1 of pratyahara

How does regularity develop Stage 1 of pratyahara?

Through regular practice of awareness, it becomes easier to observe what is happening externally and how we react internally upon receiving information through the senses. This creates a distance between us, the witness, and what we are observing, enabling us to more easily enter pratyahara.

How does Stage 1 of pratyahara develop regularity?

When we adopt a particular practice of pratyahara, in this case Stage 1, and we practise it with regularity, stability and steadiness, we gradually develop an appreciation of the benefits of regular effort in life.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar mouna Stages 1 and 2
- Ajapa japa Stages 1 to 3.

Absence of vanity and Stage 1 of pratyahara

How does absence of vanity develop pratyahara Stage 1?

Absence of vanity assists us to not take things personally, to be more humble, to be more our natural self and to realize that we are not the doer. These qualities enable us to better witness what is happening externally and to observe our inner reactions to events, people and circumstances. Thus the mind becomes quiet which is the key to the practice of pratyahara.

How does Stage 1 of pratyahara develop absence of vanity?

Through growing awareness we observe our vain and arrogant reactions and gain greater insight into ways of removing these vanities.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar darshan Stage 4 – we become aware of interactions with our self and how we relate to our self. What is my opinion of me? How do others see me? How do I

understand myself? Therefore, we observe whether we have been arrogant or vain that day.

- Pratipaksha bhavana – when we realize we are being vain we superimpose the feelings and experience of being modest and humble.

Sincerity and Stage 2 of pratyahara

How does sincerity develop Stage 2 of pratyahara?

Stage 2 of pratyahara is maintaining external equilibrium. Sincerity assists the development of Stage 2 as it makes us honest with ourselves and others. We witness and accept our reactions, rather than denying them, avoiding them or justifying ourselves. We do not try to escape the situation, for we are practising being sincere with ourselves. We start to accept ourselves as we are and that helps us maintain the external equilibrium of Stage 2 of pratyahara.

How does Stage 2 of pratyahara develop sincerity?

As our awareness deepens in this stage it gradually develops sincerity, revealing whether our motives, thoughts, words and actions agree with one another or not. When they do not, we make a more sincere effort to align them. When they do, we are better able to maintain external equilibrium.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- The SWAN principle – to develop self-acceptance. SWAN involves identifying and working with our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. We learn to accept our weaknesses and do not feel ashamed of them any longer.
- Pratipaksha bhavana
- Antar mouna Stages 1 to 3
- Antar darshan Stage 4
- Abstract mediation: ‘Who am I?’.

Simplicity and Stage 2 of pratyahara

How does simplicity develop Stage 2 of pratyahara?

We simplify our lifestyle and let go of what we no longer

need physically, materially, mentally and emotionally. We let go of activities that are no longer useful to us and we let go of our outmoded mental conditioning. With simplicity we remove complications in our lifestyle. With less clutter in our minds it is easier to maintain equilibrium in this stage of pratyahara.

How does Stage 2 of pratyahara develop simplicity?

By maintaining equilibrium externally it is easier to put simplicity into practice, for we are beginning to dis-identify with complicated lifestyles and cluttered minds.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar mouna Stages 2 and 3
- Antar darshan Stage 4.

Veracity and Stage 2 of pratyahara

How does veracity help Stage 2 of pratyahara?

Through veracity we learn to adhere to truth, speak the truth that is pleasant and not the truth which is unpleasant. When we do that it minimizes external conflicts in our daily interactions with others and quietens the mind, making it easier to maintain external equilibrium.

How does Stage 2 of pratyahara help develop veracity?

When we maintain external equilibrium it begins to effect us internally also, the mind begins to follow suit and gain a level of equilibrium. At this stage of pratyahara we are also beginning to create that ‘space’ between ourselves as the witness and the internal and external environment. Both these factors allow us to see and connect more clearly with our inner truth and the truth of the present moment.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar darshan Stages 4, 6, and 7, our relationship with ourselves, with our family members, and with the people we work with, assist in clarifying our interactions.

Equanimity and Stage 2 of pratyahara

How does equanimity develop Stage 2 of pratyahara?

As we work to maintain equanimity of mind in all situations, the emotional reactions are not as significant, making it easier to maintain external equilibrium.

How does Stage 2 of pratyahara develop equanimity?

The practice of maintaining external equilibrium gradually deepens the awareness and gives us the opportunity to find ways to react less often, this makes it easier to put equanimity into practice.

Suggested pratyahara practice:

- Pratipaksha bhavana
- Antar mouna Stages 1 to 3
- Abstract meditation: Who am I?
- Serve, love, give (ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda)
- Yoga nidra.

Equanimity and Stage 3 of pratyahara

How does equanimity develop Stage 3 of pratyahara?

Equanimity assists us to find balance when recognizing the triggering of deeply embedded memories and the associated mental and emotional reactions. As these deeper mental samskaras come to the surface we need to have that internal equanimity to handle them.

How does Stage 3 of pratyahara develop equanimity?

The deepened awareness of Stage 3 of pratyahara creates a necessary space to assist us in maintaining equanimity in all situations.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Pratipaksha bhavana
- Antar mouna Stages 1 to 3
- Yoga nidra.

Fixity and Stage 2 of pratyahara

How does fixity develop Stage 2 of pratyahara?

We use the power of fixity to attempt to keep the mind focused, stable and one-pointed when reactions arise, in this focused state external equilibrium is easier to apply.

How does Stage 2 of pratyahara develop fixity?

When we adopt the practice of Stage 2 of pratyahara and we seriously maintain external equilibrium regardless of the obstacles we are facing, we develop fixity.

Suggested pratyahara practice:

- Trataka.

Fixity and Stage 3 of pratyahara

How does fixity develop Stage 3 of pratyahara?

Practising fixity enables us to focus on the aim of Stage 3 of pratyahara and to continue our efforts, despite setbacks. Regardless of what memories are triggered in the deeper regions of our mind, we keep going, focused and fixed, looking ahead. This fixity is required to continue the process of self-discovery even in the face of painful memories or uncomfortable insights.

How does Stage 3 of pratyahara develop fixity?

Facing powerful memories requires focused and continuous effort with faith and perseverance, in spite of difficulties and obstacles along the way. An outcome of applying this faith and perseverance is an increase in fixity.

Suggested pratyahara practice:

- Trataka.

Non-irritability and Stage 2 of pratyahara

How does non-irritability develop Stage 2 of pratyahara?

In the initial stages, non-irritability can be practised externally, as we learn not to show how irritated we are by

other people or situations, in this way we are also practising maintaining external equilibrium. Practising non-irritability cultivates patience and tolerance. These qualities assist us in maintaining external equilibrium.

How does Stage 2 of pratyahara develop non-irritability?

When we maintain external equilibrium in the situations we find ourselves in, this is also the expression of non-irritability externally. When we can maintain external non-irritability this influences the mind to be less irritated.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Yoga nidra
- Antar darshan (all stages)
- Pratipaksha bhavana.

Non-irritability and Stage 3 of pratyahara

How does non-irritability develop Stage 3 of pratyahara?

If we want to go deep into the mind and recognize how the experiences of the senses trigger memories, we need to develop the ability not to be irritated by this process. The mind in this state of pratyahara will trigger many unpleasant things, and we need to remain calm as we face them. We see how memories suddenly come to the surface, consciously or unconsciously, and the reaction it triggered. If we are irritated by this we lose our awareness and impartiality. We become involved in the mental process itself. Practising non-irritability is a necessary step in training the mind for Stage 3 of pratyahara.

How does pratyahara Stage 3 assist the development of non-irritability?

Entering Stage 3 of pratyahara implies that our awareness has deepened to an extent that we are becoming far more capable of nipping the original cause of irritability in the bud. We can catch it, just as it is rearing its ugly head and snip it off.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Yoga nidra
- Antar mouna stages 1 to 3
- Pratipaksha bhavana.

Adaptability and Stage 3 of pratyahara

How does adaptability develop Stage 3 of pratyahara?

We become more flexible and less rigid which enables us to become friends with the mind and adapt to its idiosyncrasies.

How does Stage 3 of pratyahara develop adaptability?

Stage 3 cultivates adaptability as we deepen awareness of our mental processes and their connection with the senses. It gives us the opportunity to adapt to our mental program and the mental program of others. We realize that our mental program was not created overnight and that it cannot be changed overnight. In the meantime, we may not agree with the mental programming but we realize the need to put up with it and adapt to it.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar mouna Stages 2 and 3
- Antar darshan Stage 4 – daily interactions.

Humility and Stage 3 of pratyahara

How does humility develop Stage 3 of pratyahara?

Humility is of vital importance to the successful practice of Stage 3 of pratyahara. It enables us to observe and accept our mind as it is. As the senses trigger long-forgotten memories humility allows us to recognize and own up to the shortcomings and vulnerabilities that surface.

How does Stage 3 of pratyahara develop humility?

When we recognize unpleasant aspects of our mind that were not previously known, realized or acknowledged, we feel humble. This humility begets greater tolerance and understanding in the relationship to ourselves and others.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Review of the Day
- Abstract meditation: reflection on poems or ideas – such as, working with the poem ‘If’; it is a good poem to memorize.

Tenacity and Stage 3 of pratyahara

How does tenacity develop Stage 3 of pratyahara? The ability to reach Stage 3 of pratyahara implies that a degree of tenacity has already been achieved, as we have overcome many obstacles to reach this level. Focusing on tenacity enables us to hold on firmly to all the previous ITIES. With the combined force of the previous ITIES we find the stamina and tenacity to face the deeply embedded memories and their reactions.

How does Stage 3 of pratyahara develop tenacity?

Although tenacity develops Stage 3 of pratyahara, the opposite is not true. Working with Stage 3 of pratyahara doesn’t help us develop tenacity.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Manipura shuddhi – the technique which cleanses and purifies manipura chakra, which gives us strength, tenacity and willpower.

Integrity and Stage 4 of pratyahara

How does integrity develop Stage 4 of pratyahara?

Integrity is a necessary virtue for Stage 4 of pratyahara, the development of immunity to the influences we face in life. As we develop a character of high moral principles, integrity gives us immunity to what is happening internally and externally. As we make an effort not to sacrifice our principles for the sake of name, fame, money, comfort, sensual enjoyment, and so on, we are developing immunity to these objects and desires. Maintaining integrity also allows us to be immune to the criticism of others as we are

guided by the strength of our internal values rather than the opinions of others.

How does Stage 4 of pratyahara develop integrity?

Immunity to external influences enables us to focus on our spiritual goals, and in so doing, we support and strengthen our values and principles.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Abstract meditation: ‘Who am I?’
- Antar mouna Stages 1 to 4.

Nobility and Stage 4 of pratyahara

How does nobility develop Stage 4 of pratyahara?

As a noble person follows dharma and listens to the voice of the conscience, he starts to develop immunity to anything that contradicts this internal guidance.

How does Stage 4 of pratyahara develop nobility?

Immunity enables us to see the deeper purpose behind the events or situations we find ourselves in and connects with all that is noble within us.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Antar darshan Stages 1 to 6
- Antar mouna Stages 1 to 4
- Abstract meditation: ‘Who am I?’.

Magnanimity and Stage 4 of pratyahara

How does magnanimity develop Stage 4 of pratyahara?

A magnanimous person doesn’t dwell on that which is unessential, and knows how to forgive and forget. With this higher perspective there is a natural inclination to be immune to events and situations. The mind is not cluttered with petty grudges, and is more able to focus on the aim of Stage 4 of pratyahara.

How does Stage 4 of pratyahara develop magnanimity?

To become immune to what is occurring in our mind or environment, we bring out the strength to live the noble qualities that magnanimity stands for. As we don't have the clutter of unessential things in our mind that dissipates our energies, we can live what we believe in.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Abstract meditation: 'Who am I?'
- *Aum* meditation.

Charity, Generosity and Stage 5 of pratyahara

How does charity and generosity develop Stage 5 of pratyahara?

By giving and eventually surrendering what we have we empty our mind and experience shoonya, the fifth stage of pratyahara.

How does Stage 5 of pratyahara develop charity and generosity?

When we experience mental vacuum or void, when our mental conditioning has no power over us and our logical mind becomes blank, we are closer to our true self, the soul. The beautiful qualities of the soul are free to express themselves, and we realize that we are small pieces in a puzzle. We realize that other people's misery is our misery, and that other people's happiness is our happiness. To share what we have with others becomes our nature, The experience of shoonya or void brings us closer to our generous nature, higher principles and values that motivate us. We lose attachment to possessions and giving becomes easy. In the void we feel oneness with all other beings and their prosperity becomes our prosperity in life.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Serve, love, give – the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda.

Purity and Stage 5 of pratyahara

How does purity and Stage 5 of pratyahara relate to each other?

Purity and nothingness are two synonymous words. Purity is the mental nothingness in the fifth stage of pratyahara. When we experience purity in our mind and heart, our mental conditioning has no power over us, our logical mind becomes less dominant and nothingness is experienced. In the same way, purity arises spontaneously, as a result of attaining the state of nothingness.

Suggested pratyahara practices:

- Serve, love, give – the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda.

These are examples of how important the stages of pratyahara are in regard to the ITIES. However, it is only through practice and experiments that we know their intricate relationship and may discover new links between the stages of pratyahara and the ITIES. Pratyahara and the ITIES are practices and experiences, and not mere abstract concepts or lofty ideals. Therefore, it is up to us to make them a living reality in our lives, and thereby enhance the quality of our interactions and experiences in this world. The tools have been given by our masters, so let's pick them up and walk the beautiful path of the divine life.

Practices

Yoga Capsules

Considering the lack of time for yogic practice and the speed of life in modern times, Swami Niranjanananda has introduced a specific sequence of sadhana, a set of practices that are easy to do, that take only ten minutes each to complete, and which will give benefits on all levels of being. He calls this sadhana the 'yogic capsule'. Just as one takes a capsule of vitamins each day for good health, one should take a 'yogic capsule' to balance the energies in the body, improve mental efficiency, harmonize the emotions, and bring excellence in undertakings. With this sadhana, aspirants can incorporate yoga in their lifestyle without the need for major adjustments, and for the betterment and upliftment of their life.

The yogic capsule sadhana contains three mantras, three to five asanas, two pranayama practices and a short reflection or relaxation. These capsules are to be 'taken' every day. Everyone can spare ten to fifteen minutes in the morning, afternoon and evening. By adopting these capsules and integrating them into the daily routine, yoga will become part of one's daily lifestyle and ultimately spiritualize life.

Become a gardener

It is often said that one has to be a warrior to win in life, but a warrior wins by shedding blood and suppressing others. Yoga

teaches that one has to be a gardener in life. We have been given a barren piece of land and through our personal effort we have to convert it into a beautiful garden. It requires hard work and diligent effort to remove the rocks and weeds, mix the earth, and prepare proper beds. It is only then that we plant the seed. Once planted, we protect it.

This is the process that we go through when we practise yoga, not to satisfy the whims of our mind, but to follow and experience the aims set by yoga. Yogic goals are very clearly defined: cultivation of awareness, disciplining and restructuring the personality, managing the mental and emotional distractions and disturbances, and becoming the observer of one's life and actions. These are the initial goals of yoga. When one focuses on these goals and strives to achieve them, this is yoga sadhana. When one follows the dictates of one's mind, it is yoga practice. When one integrates different yoga practices to aid the development of potentials in life, one begins to live a yogic lifestyle.

The yoga capsule is a specific sequence of sadhana to incorporate yoga in one's lifestyle. It will help to create a positive and uplifting environment at home, improve mental efficiency, bring creativity in performance, harmonize the emotions, awaken the spirit and bring excellence in all that one does. This is the process of yoga in which one has to learn to become a gardener.

Mantra

The first step, upon waking up in the morning, is to practise three mantras: Mahamrityunjaya and Gayatri mantras eleven times each and the thirty-two names of Durga three times. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the mantra of healing, the Gayatri is the mantra to acquire wisdom and the thirty-two names of Durga eradicate all disturbances, distractions and distresses from life. The mantras must be practised every morning immediately upon waking up, before beginning to think, before even getting out of bed. People who have followed this guideline have felt a qualitative change in

their life, thinking process, performance, understanding, associations and relationships.

The three mantras are three sankalpas, seeds which are planted in the subconscious when the mind is peaceful, semi-dormant and not active in the waking state, not connected with the senses or sense objects. Just as one wakes up, one is on the borderline between unconscious and conscious, and that is the time when the seed of a sankalpa must be planted.

Mahāmṛtyuñjaya Mantra

Om tryambakaṃ yajāmahe sugandhiṃ puṣṭivardhanam.
Urvārukamiva bandhanāt mṛtyormukṣīya māmṛtāt.

Gāyatrī Mantra

Om bhūrbhuvahḥ svaḥ tatsaviturvareṇyaṃ.
Bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt.

Durgādvātriṃśannāmamālā

Om durgā durgārtīśamanī durgāpadvinivāriṇī.
Durgamachchhedinī durgasādhinī durganāśinī.
Durgatoddhāriṇī durganihantrī durgamāpahā.
Durgamajñānadā durga daityalokadavānalā.
Durgamā durgamālokā durgamātmasvarūpiṇī.
Durgamārgapradā durgamavidyā durgamāśritā.
Durgamajñānasamsthānā durgamadhyānabhāsinī.
Durgamohā durgamagā durgamārthasvarūpiṇī.
Durgamāsurasamhantrī durgamāyudhadhāriṇī.
Durgamāṅgī durgamatā durgamyā durgameśvarī.
Durgabhīmā durgabhāmā durgabhā durgadāriṇī.

Asana

Next, before breakfast and after finishing the morning routine, asanas and pranayama must be practised. Asanas are classified in two groups: dynamic and meditative. Although the practice of postures is begun in a dynamic way, the aim and effort should be to find a meditative state

in this dynamic movement, in which there is a focusing of awareness and energies by combining mental awareness and breath with the movement, and experiencing comfort in the movement. That is when the posture becomes an asana.

Only a few asanas are necessary for a normal, healthy person. The first is *tadasana*, the palm tree pose. Tadasana is a practice in which the pressure and compression of the bones and the spine are released. It is a practice of traction which releases compressions from different joints.

The second asana is *tiryak tadasana* or the swaying palm tree pose. This is another important posture which is simple yet effective, because here on one side a lateral stretch is taking place and on the other compression, so that tensions from the sides of the body are released. This practice is effective in aligning the defects of the spine.

The third is *kati chakrasana*, the waist rotating pose, in which the body is twisted and the various organs of the body are squeezed. This practice ensures proper circulation of blood to each and every organ, muscle and joint.

The fourth practice is *surya namaskara*, salute to the sun, in which the major movements are forward and backward bends.

These asanas cover five different movements: traction, lateral stretch, twist, forward and backward bends.

Finally, one more asana must be practised, an asana of inversion, to reverse the force of gravity in the body. However, inverted asanas are slightly more complex and should be practised only under guidance.

Pranayama

After the five asanas, two pranayamas are important for daily practice. The first is *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing. It is an effective practice to balance the nervous activities, as it brings about a balance in the functions of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and clears the pranic channels.

The second practice is *bhramari pranayama*, humming bee breath. Bhramari creates a particular frequency of vibration inside the brain which releases the cerebral, nervous and hormonal agitations, and one moves into a space of tranquillity, peace and contentment.

The morning practice thus comprises three mantras, five asanas and two pranayamas.

Relax, reflect

During the afternoon when one feels tired or stressed out, a short, fifteen-minute yoga nidra should be practised. At night, when one returns home, another investment of five to ten minutes is necessary. This practice is analysis of the events that have happened during the day, the Review of the Day. One can go through the events of the day in the mind sequentially, from the morning right up to the present moment. One has to look at the events and identify those where one encountered conflict, stress, aggression and fear.

One needs to be an objective witness to all that has happened, and gradually, without reacting, bring a simple thought in the mind, “Is there a better way to deal with this situation if it happens again?” Within a week of this practice, one will be able to direct efforts to manage the stressful situations in a better way. In addition, by observing and recognizing the stressors of the day, one eliminates them so they do not become unconscious seeds.

Meditate

Just before going to sleep, ten minutes of a short meditation should be practised. The purpose is to connect with the inner values, strengths and peace, put aside all problems, and be at peace with oneself. During those ten minutes, there should be no thoughts of family or profession, no problems and no tension. One should identify neither with the body with its experiences of stiffness and tiredness nor with the mind or mental experiences. No thought of

rejection or pain, pleasure or happiness, promotion or demotion. For ten minutes, there should be an awareness of only oneself, away from everyone else in the world. One must say to oneself, “I am not so and so. I am pure spirit, flawless, undisturbed, at peace with myself, discovering myself.” Isolating oneself from fears, stresses and anxieties, from all physical, emotional and mental connections, the focus must be on the silence and space within. If there is time, a mantra may be repeated for one mala.

Other routines

In this way, gradually, small routines and disciplines of yoga can be incorporated within normal daily activities. The capsules may be practised from Monday to Friday, and on Saturday a different activity may be undertaken, such as neti, ajapa japa, antar mouna or trataka. On Saturday evening, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra may be chanted 108 times. On Sunday, nothing. This is the yoga capsule sadhana in daily life.

There is another capsule: once a year a visit to an ashram should be made, living there in a simple manner. It means changing the environment from home to ashram, changing one's attitudes, work, routine and associations. This will recharge one's batteries. Just one week of ashram living will bring a qualitative change in life. This capsule needs to be taken at least once a year. If this discipline is maintained in life for some years while following other interests also, one will begin to experience the benefits of yoga in life. Yoga will become a part of life and not remain a practice.

Summary of Recommended Pratyahara Practices



The pratyahara practices mentioned by Swami Sivamurti in her lectures in relation to the 18 ITIES were not discussed in detail, as the audience had prior knowledge of the practices. They are given here in a short but complete practice form as a reference for the reader. For a more detailed version and explanation the reader may refer to the many Yoga Publications Trust publications. However, each practice stands independently and can be applied in the form it is given here.

ITY	Recommended pratyahara practices	Complimentary pratyahara
1. Serenity	Antar mouna Stages 1 and 2 Antar darshan Stages 1 to 3	Stage 1 (observe sense and internal reaction)
2. Regularity	Antar mouna, Stages 1 and 2 Ajapa japa Stages 1 to 3	
3. Absence of vanity	Antar darshan Stage 4 – relationship with ourselves Pratipaksha bhavana	
4. Sincerity	SWAN – to develop self-acceptance Pratipaksha bhavana Antar mouna Stages 1 to 3 Antar darshan Stage 4 Abstract meditation: Who am I?	Stage 2 (maintain external equilibrium)
5. Simplicity	Antar mouna Stages 2 and 3 Antar darshan, Stage 4	
6. Veracity	Antar darshan Stages 4, 6 and 7	
7. Equanimity	Pratipaksha bhavana Antar mouna Stages 1 to 3 Abstract meditation: Who am I? Serve, love, give (ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda) Yoga nidra	Stage 2 (maintain external equilibrium) +
8. Fixity	Trataka	Stage 3
9. Non-irritability	Yoga nidra Antar darshan, all stages Pratipaksha bhavana	(observe triggering of memories)

ITY	Recommended pratyahara practices	Complimentary pratyahara
10. Adaptability	Antar mouna Stages 2 and 3 Antar darshan Stage 4 – daily interactions	Stage 3 (observe triggering of memories)
11. Humility	Review of the Day Abstract meditation: Reflection on a poem or idea, e.g. memorizing the poem 'If'	
12. Tenacity	Manipura shuddhi – manipura chakra gives strength, tenacity, willpower.	
13. Integrity	Abstract meditation: Who am I? Antar mouna Stages 1 to 4	Stage 4 (develop immunity)
14. Nobility	Antar darshan Stages 1 to 6 Antar mouna Stages 1 to 4 Abstract meditation: Who am I?	
15. Magnanimity	Abstract meditation: Who am I? <i>Aum</i> meditation	
16. Charity	Serve, love, give (ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda)	Stage 5 (experience shoonya)
17. Generosity	Serve, love, give (ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda)	
18. Purity	Serve, love, give (ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda)	

Preliminary Ajapa Japa

Of all the systems of yoga used to induce pratyahara and intended to lead eventually to samadhi, japa yoga is the easiest and safest and can be practised by anyone at any time and under any conditions. The word *japa* itself means 'to rotate'. Japa yoga means union of the self with the highest existence through the rotation of consciousness. A mantra is the first requirement for japa yoga. A mantra is a grouping of sound vibrations which have an effect on the mental and psychic consciousness of man. Tradition says it is best if it is given by a guru or in a dream. An important point is that the mind should be fully impressed by this mantra. The mantra *Om* is a universal mantra and can be used by anyone.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Stage I: Preparation

Sit in padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana or sukhasana.

In this session we will take up the important subject of ajapa japa.

The word *japa* means repetition, rotation.

Ajapa japa means repetition without forced concentration, or spontaneous repetition.

There are different techniques used to keep the inner mind in touch with the mantra, whether it is the mantra *Om* or the mantra *Soham*.

We will use the mantra *Soham*.

The mantra is the inherent sound of the breath itself; *So* is the ingoing breath and *Ham* is the outgoing breath. This practice forms the basis of kriya yoga and other parts of kundalini yoga.

The first stage needs attention.

Become aware of your breath and become aware that you have not been aware of your breath for some time.

You have not been aware of it all night.

Your centre of awareness is in the throat, the frontal counterpart to vishuddhi chakra, *vishuddhi kshetram*.

The breath should be normal but not nasal; it should be from the epiglottis as it is naturally at night when you are sleeping, almost like snoring.

There should be little sound; the breath is subtle.

Close your eyes and stop all physical movement.

Become aware of the whole body.

If you maintain awareness of the whole body it will become quiet.

Concentrate or become aware of the throat, the frontal counterpart to vishuddhi.

You can feel your breath, which is not gross enough to hear.

Let the breath adjust itself and move spontaneously.

Maintain awareness of your breath.

The throat must become part of your constant awareness.

The feeling of the breath in the throat is the object of attention.

You have one idea . . . 'I know I am breathing in; I know I am breathing out.'

Each round of breathing should be the object of your awareness.

Do not try to go in.

If your mind wanders, let it but be aware of it.

Remember, 'I know I am breathing in; I know I am breathing out.'

The centre of awareness is vishuddhi.

Stage 2: Breathing in the frontal passage

Now to be more clear, instead of the suggestion, 'I am breathing in, I am breathing out,' suggest to yourself, 'I feel the breath ascending and descending, I know it is moving between throat and navel.'

Do not go in.

No suspension please.

Come out.

Do not fall forwards or sideways.

No blank mind, keep the mind moving externally.

Awareness of the ascending and descending breath and awareness of 'I know'.

You are aware that you are aware of the breath.

The second stage of this practice is awareness of the ascending and descending breath.

No shaking or jerking, do not lose track.

Super awareness of awareness.

Keep your body stiff mentally.

With an expanded mind as if you are fully awake.

You know you are aware.

In the depths of meditation and concentration there is awareness.

'Yes, I am sure I am not sleeping, I am in a state of wakefulness.'

Ascending and descending breath, between the navel, manipura kshetram, and the throat, vishuddhi kshetram.

Between these two points there is no loss of consciousness even for one second.

Awareness of the breath ascending and descending.

The sutra is awareness of the breath.

Awareness of the ascending breath from the navel and descending breath from the throat.

The track and the way is the psychic way.

The path is for the psyche.

Keep awake, like a constant unfluctuating flame in a windless place.

Awareness of the psychic breath ascending and descending.

Practise and listen at the same time. This is important.

Stage 3: Awareness of Soham

This is the third stage.

Moving your psychic breath awareness between the navel and the throat.

The path is the psychic path.

You know you are aware of the ascending and descending movement.

Expanded inner consciousness.

You should be awake internally.

Descending . . . manipura . . . I know.

Ascending . . . vishuddhi . . . I know.

Awareness of awareness.

If you do it correctly for five minutes, the body is controlled by willpower, awareness is internalized, with alertness, as if you are counting coins, or driving a car through heavy traffic.

Be aware of the movements of your consciousness.

If you understand me, you are developing a deeper awareness of your personality.

You are a seer of awareness.

Become stiff like a statue, like a stone that does not move.

This idea of a psychic path between the navel and the throat must become very clear.

More than that, it is important to know that you are aware of it.

In this ascending and descending process you have to develop awareness of the sound *Soham*.

The ascending sound is *So*.

The descending breath awareness is *Ham*.

Do it . . . *Soham*.

If your mind is dissipated, know it.

Do not hide the truth.

You are practising awareness of the behaviour of your mind.

Know what you are doing.
No movement, you are like a statue.
Soham is a powerful mantra which makes the mind quiet very quickly, but it also brings sleep.

Ending the practice

Slowly end the practice.
Stop the mental repetition of *Soham*.
Slowly withdraw your awareness from the movement of the breath.
Expand your awareness from vishuddhi chakra into the whole body.
Become aware of the whole body in the sitting posture.
Become aware of any sensation in the body, pain, discomfort, tightness or tension, the sensation of feeling cold or hot.
Become aware of your external surrounding, the various sounds, sounds in the room, sounds coming from outside the room.
Remember where you are, situate the body in its environment of the room, the people around you.
Be fully aware of your body and the environment.
Become aware of the natural flow of your breath.
Prepare yourself for *Om* chanting.
Take a deep breath in and chant *Om* three times.
Then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Antar Mouna

The Sanskrit word *mouna* means ‘silence’, and *antar* means ‘inner’. Therefore, the English name of this practice is ‘inner silence’. It is a great sadhana designed to make the aspirant aware of the inner silence as well as the inner noise which generally prevents one from knowing the silence.

In our daily life our minds are almost continually externalized. We see and hear only what is going on outside of us, and we have little understanding of the events taking place in our inner environment. The practice of antar mouna is designed to turn this around, so that for at least a short period we can see the workings of our mind and understand them. In reality antar mouna is one of the few ‘permanent sadhanas’ which can be practised spontaneously all the twenty-four hours of the day by anyone who is determined to know themselves. By maintaining awareness of one’s internal environment, thoughts, emotional reactions, and so on, one can speed up one’s personal evolution to the utmost degree. It will make one understand the workings of one’s rational and irrational mind, as well as give one an understanding of what makes other people tick.

The practice of antar mouna is subdivided into a number of stages. Stage 1 of the technique is to be aware of all the outside sounds and occurrences that are going on around. Stage 2 is to withdraw oneself from all outside stimuli and to be aware only of the workings of

the mind: what it is thinking, how it is reacting and what images are coming from the subconscious. Stage 3 is the conscious creation of thoughts, which is followed in Stage 4 by awareness and dissolution of spontaneous thoughts. Stage 5, the last practicable stage, is the suppression or removal of all thoughts, or the awareness of *shoonya*, the void, followed in Stage 6 by the state of spontaneous meditation.

Antar mouna can be practised at any time by simply reflecting on the question, ‘What am I thinking? What is occurring now in my mental sphere?’ When practised many times daily, this witnessing process becomes an automatic occurrence continuing by itself and showing you who you are, what you are doing here and where you are going. It can truly be said that in this practice through the awareness of inner noise you will come to know the voice of silence, the golden sound that sings of eternity.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Complete practice (Stages 1–5)

Stage 1: Awareness of external stimuli

Please close your eyes and keep them closed throughout. The asana is steady, the position is steady, the eyes are closed, the spinal cord is erect. ‘I am prepared for inner silence’ – this should be the mood of the mind.

The preliminary practice is not awareness of internal things, but awareness of external sensual experiences, different sounds, different sensations, different sensual experiences.

Concentrate on the external sounds and sensations, not at all considering them to be disturbances in concentration. With absolute concentration, with total external awareness do this practice until you find a change of atmosphere in your mind.

Don’t fight with your senses, do not struggle with your sense expressions and sense experiences but become aware, or become a spectator of them.

You should be aware.

You should now awaken the awareness of 'I am aware, I am hearing, I am aware that I am hearing a voice.'

In this way the mind and the senses should be trained to become undisturbed by the sensual experiences.

Neither sound nor taste nor touch nor anything else should disturb you at any cost.

In spite of the fact that you hear the outer sounds or that you experience different sensations in your physical body, such as itching, laziness, scratching, and so on, you should not be disturbed by them.

Not by force but by a technique the senses should be withdrawn from the respective objects of the senses.

The senses should be calmed down by the witness, *drashta* or *sakshi* attitude.

The senses should be calmed down by the attitude of 'I am witnessing the experience of hearing and I am aware of the sound, the music of birds.'

'I' is the third thing in this process.

First are the ears, second is the object of experience, the sound, the music of the birds, and third is 'I', who is the spectator, who is the witness of this process of sense experiences.

In this way you should distinctly, deeply and intensely, with classification, develop this threefold awareness in the first stage of *antar mouna*.

The experiencer, the object of experience and the seer of both.

The subject and the object, the ears and the sound, the eyes and the form, the skin and the touch, the tongue and the taste, the nose and the smell.

This should be witnessed properly, without any sense of disturbance.

You will find within a few moments there is an atmosphere of calm, tranquillity and peace, and then you will be ready for meditation.

Stage 2: Awareness of spontaneous thought process

Become aware of your thinking process.

You should become aware of thoughts, the spontaneous thought process, thoughts that come and go of their own accord.

You don't have to bring in a thought flow.

Let it come spontaneously and let it go of its own accord.

You must remain a silent witness of every thought that is going through your mind.

When you become aware of a particular thought you will have to say to your mind, 'Yes, I am thinking about this and that.'

If the mind becomes free of thought you should try to become aware of that state also.

There can come a stage of thoughtlessness even in the case of a beginner.

You should remain alert all throughout, and the form of this is not to check the thoughts but to know the thoughts.

If sometimes you become absent-minded and then you revive your consciousness, say to yourself, 'Well, I became absent-minded for some time and during those moments I was thinking of this and that.'

They may be good thoughts, or they may be bad thoughts, but those thoughts do not come from anywhere outside.

They are expressions of your inner personality, they are expressions of yourself.

In the first practice, the sense experiences came from outside.

Here, in this stage, the thoughts are manifestations or expressions of your inner self.

When you are able to see your own thoughts, you are able to know the content of your personality.

If bad thoughts do not come to your conscious mind continually, it means that either you have become a liberated sage, or suppression is still there.

The suppression is too tight, the suppressions of the subconscious mind are not released.

Therefore, remember that you are an aspirant.
Remember you are a practitioner of pratyahara.
Bad thoughts and good thoughts will come.
They should come and you must bring them up.
If they come, please look at them indifferently, with
absolute detachment, as a witness.
This is the second stage of antar mouna.
When bad thoughts come to your mind, do not stop
them; immediately become alert, become aware that
you are thinking of murder, revenge, robbery, and so on.
If bad thoughts come to you, if you do not want to
observe them, if you suppress them, they will come to
you with greater force next time.

Stage 3: Creation and disposal of thoughts at will

Bring to mind any thought which you want to think.
Don't let it come spontaneously, but bring it in by your will.
Think it over for some time and then – dash it off.
Do not allow spontaneous thoughts to express and
manifest at all, but create a thought voluntarily at will.
Maintain it for some time, brood over the thought, and
then suddenly, with a jerk, dash it off.
If a spontaneous thought wants to express itself, however
good or bad or interesting or inspiring the thought may
be, do not allow it to manifest but say, “No! I don't want
you now.”
Think another thought, maintain it and brood over it
for some time and then with a sudden jerk, dash it off.
Go on to the third; create a thought, maintain it, and
when you have thought over it for some time dash it off
and go on to any other thought of your choice.
It is not difficult to get rid of good thoughts, but evil
thoughts are stubborn.
Once bad thoughts come to your mind, at any time
of the day, it becomes difficult to get rid of them, and
therefore the mental training should proceed this way:
You create a bad thought at will, brood over it for a
minute or so, and then with a jerk dash it off.

If you practise this for some time, for a month or so, your mind will definitely develop a habit of dashing off, throwing off, or disposing of the bad thoughts that come up from the depths of your subconscious.

It is definitely a great achievement if an aspirant, or anybody for that matter, is able to shake off, or dispose of bad thoughts as and when they surface in the mind.

Stage 4: Awareness and disposal of spontaneous thoughts

In the fourth stage of inner silence spontaneous thoughts are to be awakened; the thoughts are to be allowed spontaneity.

Spontaneity of thoughts.

You don't bring thoughts at will, as you did in Stage 3.

Just allow thoughts to come, and think about them for some time.

When the point of disposal comes, you should dispose of the thought at will.

It is not that a particular thought goes away spontaneously.

Its arrival is spontaneous, but its departure should depend upon your own will.

In this fourth exercise I am not asking you to allow bad thoughts only.

Good and bad both from your subconscious mind should be allowed to come up spontaneously.

Stage 5: Awareness of the inner space

This is the fifth step in antar mouna.

Now look within.

Awareness of the inner space, awareness of the inner space, awareness of the inner space.

Be aware of chidakasha.

Be aware of the inner space, be aware of the colourless and formless inner space of your psyche, and then be aware of thoughts. If you think any thought, if a thought comes into your mind, dash it off, dispose of it, immediately, without brooding over it.

Keep yourself absolutely alert, alert in the sense that if any thought comes into your mind you immediately dispose of it.

You do not brood over the thought, you do not recognize it at all. A thought comes up and you immediately push it down and out.

This is the stage where thoughtlessness is practised.

Any thought that comes into your chidakasha, any thought that manifests from within, and it will manifest, has to be dashed off. If in place of thoughts, forms and visions come into your conscious plane, then you will have to employ a different method, and that is the method of dissolving the form into formlessness.

Sometimes you look into your inner space and the space is devoid of colour and form. But in certain cases the forms, like dreams or like visions, not of course ideas and imaginations, but clear-cut forms come up on the surface of that consciousness. Supposing that it is a bird or a woman or a tree or a landscape, you should immediately try to disperse it, as if a drop of water is spilled over a canvas where you have made a picture. And immediately within a moment you find that the whole picture, that the whole work of art is dissolved.

Therefore, there are two different sadhanas in this stage. One is that you become aware of the inner space. You become aware of the inner space, and if any idea comes in the form of thought and imagination, you just dispose of it. Try to maintain a state of thoughtlessness.

Try to maintain a state of thoughtlessness by remaining aware of one thought that 'I shall have no thought.'

This is the real state of inner silence in which every thought that tries to manifest on the inner surface of consciousness is immediately disposed of, is not allowed to manifest, is not allowed to manifest.

The forms and the visions that flow on the surface of consciousness are to be correctly and properly dissolved in the formless chidakasha that is within your psychic

self, that is your own psychic personality. 'I do not want any thought, I do not want any thought, I do not want to think any thought.'

Only one thought, only one thought should be allowed to remain in your consciousness, and that single thought is that 'I shall have no thoughts.'

Stage 1 of inner silence, broadly speaking, is to remain aware of sense experiences with absolute indifference and with an attitude of a witness.

Stage 2 is watching the spontaneous incoming and outgoing thought processes.

Stage 3 is thinking at will, brooding at will and disposing at will of your thoughts.

Stage 4, incoming of spontaneous thoughts, disposal of thoughts at will.

Stage 5, no thinking process; every thought that emanates from your consciousness is to be immediately disposed of. You should not allow your mind to think any thought, and if the mind tries to do so, stop it.

This is the complete practice of inner silence.

Ending the practice

Prepare to end the practice.

Become aware of the whole body in the sitting posture.

Become aware of any sensation in the body: pain, discomfort, tightness or tension, the feeling of cold or hot.

Become aware of your external surrounding, the various sounds, sounds in the room, sounds coming from outside the room.

Remember where you are, situate the body in its environment of the room, the people around you.

Be fully aware of your body and the environment.

Become aware of the natural flow of your breath.

Prepare yourself for *Om* chanting.

Take a deep breath in and chant *Om* three times.

Then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Antar Darshan

In order to manage the emotional upheavals there is the practice of antar darshan. For thought we have *antar mouna*, inner silence, and for emotion we have *antar darshan*, vision of the inner self. These are the meditative techniques which can help us to gradually recognize the associations of the mind and to harmonize them.

In antar darshan we become aware of a feeling or emotion. We go to the root of that feeling or emotion. Why is it happening? Is it rajasic? Is it tamasic? Is it sattwic? Awareness has to develop. Do I have the ability to wilfully alter the course, the flow of that emotion? Do I have the voluntary control to stop it from affecting me or the other person? It is an expression of our in-depth awareness. Antar darshan is the observation of the interaction of human emotion with logic.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Antar Darshan Practice, April 2013, Ganga Darshan

Swami Sivamurti

Stage I: Preparation

Close your eyes and take a steady comfortable position.
Ensure the spine is erect and that the head is facing ahead of you, slightly tilted forwards.
Ensure that you are comfortable and relaxed.

For a few moments observe the body posture and allow it to become still.

Mentally observe the position of the spine, the legs, the arms, the head, the placement of your body on the floor, the entire body, complete awareness of the entire physical structure of the body.

If there is tightness or tension in any part of the body then you can adjust your position so that you feel more comfortable.

Ensure that your body is in the most comfortable meditative posture. Make physical adjustments wherever necessary until you find a way to release tension that is building up in any particular part of the body.

Become aware of the natural and spontaneous rhythm of your breath.

Gradually encourage each inhalation and each exhalation to become slower and deeper.

If you are familiar with ujjayi pranayama practise it now. Adjust your breathing from the natural breathing to the ujjayi breath.

Slow deep breathing, psychic breathing.

Become aware of a space within the body.

Allow your awareness of the breath to continue and simultaneously become aware of the space that inhabits your physical body.

Total awareness of the space within every cell, within every molecule, within every atom.

Feel calm.

As in antar mouna, withdraw your awareness from the external world and centre it within the feeling of the space and solitude within you.

Stage 2: Entering the heart space

Now take your awareness away from the breath and bring it to the region of the chest encompassed by the ribcage, extending into the space between the sternum and the spine and between the diaphragm and the shoulders.

As you inhale feel as though the space within the chest region is expanding and as you exhale feel as though it is contracting.

You are in the heart space, *hridayakasha*.

Feel as though it is an infinite space saturated with silence and stillness.

In this vast space of the heart which is enveloped in darkness become aware of a tiny flame of light.

It is a flame of golden light, very tiny, very clear and very bright.

Intensify your awareness of this golden light within the region of the heart. As you inhale that little flame expands. As you exhale it contracts.

With each inhalation become aware of this glow, the glow of the light becoming stronger and brighter and momentarily filling the entire space with light.

With each exhalation this glow from the little flame, this expansive light within the chest region recedes to a tiny glow.

Become aware of this pulsation of light which expands and recedes with every inhalation and every exhalation filling the entire space with luminosity.

Constant awareness of this inner movement.

Awareness of that beautiful light imploding and exploding within you.

Stage 3: Awareness of feelings from recent interactions

Keeping that experience in the background, bring your awareness to your feelings and emotions from recent interactions today.

You remain aware of the space in the heart, but at the same time you become aware of the feelings and emotions that have been stirred up from recent interactions today.

You have had so many different interactions today with people you know and with people you don't know, possibly with members of your family.

Let them appear in a spontaneous order before your awareness, before that ability within you to witness situations.

Constant awareness.

Be aware of the feelings that have been stirred up by recent interactions today.

You can either feel them or you can visually see them within you.

They will come as thoughts or emotional reactions or as scenes within you.

From all these different incidents and interactions that have taken place today, allow your focus to settle on one of these interactions.

Settle on the one that is most predominant in your memory from today's interactions.

Relive that interaction and the emotional reactions from it using your power of imagination in the best way you can.

How does it make you feel now?

Be aware of it, try to recognize your emotions and feelings coming from that interaction, from that experience that happened today that you have selected.

Give yourself time to take a better look at feelings and emotions that came about from this incident.

Acknowledge them. Be aware. If there is a tendency within you to deny them, accept them, acknowledge them. They are a part of your own personal make up.

You may not like them. You may not want them. In retrospect you may feel ashamed of them. It does not matter. Everyone passes through the same experiences at some time.

Just be aware of the thoughts and emotions that have come from this particular interaction that you have chosen to deal with.

What you are doing now in reviewing the interaction, is that you are giving your mind time to digest what occurred.

It is important that you accept the emotions that arose from those interactions, that you acknowledge them as ‘my’ anger, ‘my’ happiness, ‘my’ surprise.

Whatever the emotion or feeling is that comes to the surface as you study the particular interaction, put ‘my’ in front of it.

Keep in mind that if we do not give time to acknowledge and accept the emotions coming from interactions in the course of the day, if we don’t give time to digest the first one before the next one comes, it will slowly start sinking into the mind and create far greater problems in the future.

It will become a source of tension and anxiety acting below the surface.

You won’t even be aware of why you are feeling tense or anxious when a similar interaction occurs again.

You will not feel comfortable inside yourself.

Now choose another incident that happened during the course of this day.

It does not matter whether you have finished the previous one or not.

If you choose to at a later time, you can pick it up again and study it again, but now go to another interaction.

Choose a strong incident that has happened and try to relive it to the best of your ability.

See the event as objectively as you can.

Make the effort to understand why you felt as you did.

Why you behaved as you did, why you reacted the way you did.

Continue in this way allowing these reflections to give you a better understanding of your inner reactions and your emotional personality.

Awareness of the second interaction that you have chosen to observe and look at today.

Stage 4: Awareness of feelings about yourself

Now you are going to take a look at the feelings and emotions that you have about yourself.

How do you feel about yourself?

What type of feelings do you carry with you from your early life?

Feelings that have been engendered from your family, your friends or your education.

How do you feel about yourself?

How do you relate to yourself?

Amongst all the feelings that come to the surface, there will be one emotion or feeling that is stronger than the rest.

Try and discover that feeling that you have about yourself that colours all the other feelings.

Let it happen naturally.

First just try and discern the different feelings and emotions you have about yourself.

As certain feelings about yourself come to the surface they will generate yet other feelings. Be aware of them too.

If your mind wanders bring it back on track.

Your emotions and your feeling about yourself are important to understand, to recognize and acknowledge.

Give yourself time to reflect on them. In time it will bring you a better understanding of yourself.

Many issues and personal problems arise because we have no understanding of our own emotions, reactions and feelings.

We don't understand our reactions which are often emotional.

Therefore, with this lack of understanding we are not able to behave in a balanced way and that creates difficulties in our lives.

Awareness of your relationship with yourself.

Can you be alone with yourself? Do you feel content?

Or do you feel uncomfortable? Or do you feel as though you need to fill those moments which you could spend in solitude in the company of others? Or with other activities?

Do you like yourself? Are you proud of yourself? Do you dislike yourself? Are you ashamed of yourself? What are the emotions that come to the surface?

What is the overall emotion and feeling that colours the others?

Try to discover what it is. Are you in touch with the feelings about yourself? Or do you find it difficult to generate feelings and recognize feelings about yourself? The feelings and the emotions are there but can you connect with them?

Stage 5: Awareness of feelings towards your family

Now relax your efforts in relation to feelings about yourself and become aware of how you feel about your family. What are your feelings about your parents? When the word mother, your mother, comes to your mind what do you feel?

Don't dig deeply just be aware of the feelings that come spontaneously.

When the word father, your father, comes to your mind what feelings does it generate?

Acknowledge, recognize, become aware of the feelings that you have towards your parents.

Be also aware that those feelings generate yet other feelings.

Try to be the witness, be aware of the feeling and try to name the feeling and be aware of the effect and the influence that the feeling has on the body, mind and senses.

At the same time, always remember that you are the witness, you are not the feeling, thought, sentiment or emotion. You are the witness. You are experiencing and identifying these feelings as they come.

Become aware of your feelings associated with your brothers or sisters or your lack of brother or a sister.

Many times our feelings towards other people are coloured by our experiences with our family members.

Recall the different feelings that you have had towards your mother or father or brother or sister throughout your life. Have they changed?

Are the feelings that you now have towards your mother and father different from when you were younger?

If so, how have they changed? How do you feel about the change in your feelings towards them?

Try to see the feelings through their eyes. Try to understand their point of view.

If there have been changes in your feelings between then and now, are the changes for the better or for the worse?

Do you remember what caused these changes to occur?

Wherein lies your responsibility for the change of feelings?

If your feelings have changed for the worse, what have you done? What can you do to improve your feelings towards your family mother, father, brother and sister?

Now call in different family members: aunts, uncles – what feelings come to the surface when you think of them?

Or your grandmother or grandfather, or your grandchildren, allow your mind to move around your family as you know it.

Isolate and acknowledge the feelings that come as you remember each family member.

Take your time doing this in your own speed.

Constant awareness.

Remember not only to acknowledge and recognize your own feelings, but try to see the feelings that they have for you also.

Have the feelings changed from your side or from their side through the course of the years, and wherein lies the responsibility?

Stage 6: Awareness of feelings towards people you work with

Now become aware of the people that you are associating with through your work. First look at your peers. How do you relate to your peers? How do you communicate to your peers? Is there ease of communication?

Is there recognition from both sides of the work done?
Do you feel threatened or competitive towards your peers?
Do you prefer working alone or in a team? And why?
How do your peers see you?
What image do you project to your peers? Is it a true image of your capabilities or is it a false image?
Do you live in fear of being discovered for not being as good as you appear to be? Or are you much better than you appear to be?
Have a look at the boss, the one you report to, who gives you directives, who gives you your work.
How is your relationship with that person?
Look at your subordinates, the people who work for you.
What is your relationship with these people? How do they see you? How do you see them?
How do you see your boss and how does your boss see you?
How do you see your peers and how do your peers see you?
Awareness of the channels of communication between you.
Allow such thoughts to revolve around in your mind and discover the feelings and the emotions associated with these relationships in your work environment.
Remember to make the effort to be the witness of the feelings about the people there.
You witness the feelings and emotions passing through.
Constant awareness.
Are you or other people over-worked or under-worked?
Constant awareness of the feelings about the people you work with, the place you work in, and your ability to accept the feelings you have.
What are the feelings that come to the surface when you think of your boss, your peers, your subordinates?
Do they generate other feelings?
Can you accept the feelings?
Put yourself in their shoes and try to see yourself through their eyes also.

Can you express these feelings to the boss or the peers or the subordinates and not to a third party?

It is easy to express our feelings to a third party. Sometimes it is more difficult to express our feelings directly to our peers or to our subordinates or to the boss, about our relationship with them, our work with them.

Be the witness, the silent witness, observing the emotional content of your mind in relation to the people you work with.

Stage 7: Awareness of feelings towards your work

Then gradually introduce feelings and emotions that you have about your work place and the type of work that you do.

What are your feelings in relation to your work?

How do you feel with the work that you are doing? Is it satisfying?

Where do you spend the greater part of the day?

Whether you work in the office or at home, what are your feelings about the place in which you work?

Does your work inspire you and uplift you? Do you find expression for your innate creativity?

Or do you wake up in the morning and realize that you have to face another day working?

Does it look to you like drudgery and toil?

How much opportunity do you have to express yourself, to take initiative in your work?

Do you want to change your work? What would suit you better?

Do you want to change your work place? What work environment would suit you better?

Stage 8: Awareness of feelings about your life

Lastly we need to sort out our feelings in relation to our ideals, our aspirations and our goals in life.

To live a happy life, a satisfying life, we need to live a life that has a meaning for us, a life that is according to our main principles.

How do you feel about your life?

What can you do today that is within your power to improve your feelings towards your life?

You also need to look at how you feel you are progressing, as sometimes you do not feel good about your progress and at other times you feel happy about it.

It is necessary to look at all these areas in which you live. Once you do that, you can then consider that you have started to get your life and what is around you in order.

Stage 9: Ending the practice

Now gently stop your efforts and let the spontaneous emotions flow again without any particular direction or feeling.

Just awareness of the spontaneous feelings coming to the surface.

Then relax your efforts and return your awareness to your spontaneous natural breath, to the people around you, to the environment in which you find yourself. When you are ready gently open your eyes and relax your position.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Trataka

The word *trataka* means ‘to gaze steadily’, and the practice of trataka develops concentration. In order to concentrate on an object, either internal or external, the mind must be kept under control so that it is not distracted. One way of doing this is by choosing something as the object of concentration which will make the mind experience peace and steadiness. For this purpose the mantra *Om*, a flower, a picture of your guru, a deity, or the flame of a candle can be chosen. The candle flame is the most convenient and practical object for beginners.

Trataka consists of two stages – *bahir trataka* and *antar trataka*. In *bahir trataka*, or external trataka, the concentration is on an outer object because this is easier for the untrained mind, since the mind likes to attach itself to outside objects. In *antar trataka*, or inner visualization, the mind is trained to introvert.

The practice of trataka has many beneficial effects. Daily practice helps to develop the power of concentration and memory. It also helps to strengthen the eye muscles and so improves the eyesight.

Trataka should be practised in the steadiest possible posture. In both external and internal trataka, the eyes should not blink or move in any way. At first this is a little difficult, but with practice it becomes easy. The important thing is relaxation of the eyes. This is essential to obtain

a clear inner image. The mind should be kept only on the object or image, nothing else. If the mind starts to think of other things, gently bring it back to the object of concentration.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Trataka on a candle flame

Stage 1: Preparation

Adjust your position so that you are one arm's length away from the candle flame.

Ideally, the flame should be at eye level.

If it is lower, it will create strain when you are practising, if it is too high it will also create strain.

The correct level is exactly at eye level.

Close your eyes and make sure that you are comfortable.

Chant *Om* three times – breathe in *Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . .*

Keep your eyes closed.

Stage 2: Body awareness

Become aware of your body.

Create a mental picture of your body, be aware of your whole body.

Feel that your body is growing from the ground like a tree.

Your whole body is firm like a tree growing from the ground.

Your legs are the roots, and the rest of your body is the trunk.

Feel the firmness of your body.

Your whole body is fixed in the ground, it is part of the ground.

There is no difference between your body and the ground.

Your body is growing from the ground.

Try to experience this.

Be aware of your whole body, and its firmness on the ground.

Your whole body is fixed firmly in the ground.

Total awareness of your body.

Be aware of your right foot, your left foot. Either you can feel it, or you can create a mental picture of it or both.

Your right knee – total awareness. Your left knee. Your right thigh, your left thigh. Your right buttock, your left buttock. Your whole back – be aware. Your abdomen. Your chest. Your right arm – total awareness. Your left arm. Your head. Your whole body.

Be aware of your whole body – nothing else.

Now open your eyes.

Stage 3: Outer gazing

Look directly into the middle of the flame at the top of the wick.

Try not to blink your eyes. The less you try the easier it is, so don't use too much effort.

Allow your eyes to relax.

Fix your eyes at the top of the wick in the middle of the flame.

Focus your whole attention at the top of the wick.

There is nothing else but the top of the wick.

If you must blink your eyes, then do so – don't strain, but as much as possible look at the top of the wick without flickering or blinking your eyes.

Your whole vision should be focused on the top of the wick. (*Long pause*)

Try to pierce the top of the wick with your vision.

Total concentration. (*Long pause*)

Fix your vision on the top of the wick.

There is nothing else, only the top of the wick.

Your vision is almost pulled to the top of the wick, like a magnet attracts iron filings.

Feel as though your vision, your attention, is being pulled to the top of the wick.

Stage 4: Inner trataka

Now close your eyes.

Watch the after-image of the candle flame if you can see it.

If you can see it, watch it, as a witness.

If you cannot see it, don't worry, merely watch whatever happens in front of your closed eyes.

You must only be a witness; don't involve yourself with what is happening in front of your closed eyes.

See it as happening outside yourself, as something separate from yourself. Be aware. (*Long pause*)

Whatever happens in front of your closed eyes, let it happen. Don't suppress it. (*Long pause*)

Stage 5: Repetition of Stages 3 and 4

Now open your eyes and look into the candle flame.

Again concentrate on the top of the wick, in the middle of the flame.

Allow your eyes to relax, but try not to blink or flicker your eyes.

Try to fix, to rivet your attention on the top of the wick in the middle of the flame.

Feel the magnetic attraction of the top of the wick. (*Long pause*)

There is nothing else but the top of the wick.

Be totally absorbed in watching the wick in the centre of the flame.

Try to pierce the top of the wick with your vision.

Now close your eyes.

Again, watch the after-image if you can see it.

If you can't see it, then watch the space in front of your closed eyes.

Watch anything that might occur there.

You must be a witness, an observer.

Don't become emotionally involved in what happens there.

Only watch, nothing more. (*Long pause*)

If you can still see a clear image of the candle, then focus your attention on the wick, if you are able to.

If you see visions or pretty pictures, watch them as though you are watching television, but don't interfere with the program.

Only watch. (*Long pause*)

Now open your eyes for the last round.

Again focus your whole attention on the top of the wick. Look into the centre of the flame, into the middle of the flame, into the very core of the flame.

Try not to blink or to flicker your eyes.

The less you try, the easier it becomes.

When you try too hard, it is difficult.

When you relax more, and do not try so hard, it becomes easier. So try, but not too hard.

Focus your attention on the top of the wick, on nothing else. (*Long pause*)

Look into the heart of the flame, at the wick.

Now close your eyes.

The procedure is the same.

Watch the after-image of the candle if you can see it.

Otherwise watch the black space, and see what happens.

Whatever happens, be a witness, nothing more.

Don't interfere, only observe. (*Long pause*)

Stage 6: Ending the practice

Now chant *Om* five times. Feel the vibrations of *Om* throughout your whole body, your whole brain, the whole room, everywhere. Feel that you are a transmitting station of *Om*, and also feel that you are a receiving station.

Feel the vibrations of *Om* pulsating, vibrating, reverberating, everywhere.

Breathe in, *Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . .*

Keep your eyes closed for one minute and be aware of your feelings, of your state of mind, of the sounds outside, but sit quietly for one minute. (*Pause*)

Hari Om Tat Sat

Manipura Shuddhi

Manipura chakra is the third of the ascending chakras, mooladhara being the first and swadhisthana the second. Manipura is a most important centre and is widely mentioned in traditional scriptures. In Buddhism, it is regarded as the seat of kundalini, although in reality kundalini can be regarded as residing in all chakras. Tantra yoga regards spiritual life, or expansion of awareness, as starting at the level of the mooladhara chakra, for it is here that we begin to become aware of ourselves, even if in a very rudimentary form. Therefore, kundalini is said to reside at the mooladhara chakra level. Buddhism, regards expansion of awareness as beginning at manipura chakra, the lower chakras being considered as instinctive levels.

Manipura chakra is the centre of prana within the human framework. It is the centre of the incredibly complex network of subtle energy that permeates and controls the body from behind the scenes. It is the centre that puts us directly in contact with the subtle forces of the cosmos.

The Sanskrit word *shuddhi* means 'purification'. Therefore, this technique can be called the 'manipura purification' in English.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Practice of manipura shuddhi

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Hold the back straight. Keep the eyes closed.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Feel the contraction and expansion of the navel as you breathe in and out.

Feel as though you are breathing in and out at the navel, the *manipura kshetram*.

Fix your whole attention at the navel.

Feel that the breath is being drawn from the manipura chakra trigger point in the spine through the navel and outwards as the abdomen expands during inhalation.

Feel that the breath is being pushed inwards through the navel to the manipura chakra in the spine as the abdomen contracts with exhalation.

Be attentive to this rhythmical process.

Continue in this manner for at least 10 minutes.

Then combine the mantra *Aum* with the inhalation and exhalation of breath.

You should still continue to feel the movement of breath inwards and outwards, but it must be now synchronized with *Aum*.

Feel the breath and mantra piercing the navel, manipura kshetram, and the manipura chakra in the spine.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available. Be attentive.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Aum Meditation

This practice is so simple yet the benefits and experience that it can bring are profound. The mantra *Aum* is the king of mantras. Experience of the meaning of *Aum* leads automatically to the fullest understanding of all other mantras, which are generally limited in that they are intended for specific purposes or for particular types of people. *Aum* on the other hand is totally non-specific. It can be practised by everyone.

The mantra *Aum* is not merely a monosyllable. It is a sound that has been realized by the ancient rishis in the highest states of meditation. It is for this reason that continuous and intense awareness of *Aum* can in turn take the spiritual aspirant to the same states as the ancients who realized it. It is one of the most powerful methods of rapidly relaxing the entire mind and body. Whenever you feel tense, depressed, angry or any other negative emotions, you should practise *Aum* chanting.

The following brief description is for awareness of only the sound of *Aum*. Concentration on the symbol and reflection on the meaning can be integrated.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Practice of *Aum* chanting

Sit in a comfortable asana and close the eyes.
Start to intonate *Aum*, either slowly or quickly.
Let the chanting be aloud if this is convenient.
Try to be aware completely of the sound of *Aum*. Lose
your whole being in *Aum*.
Let the sound emanate from your whole being.
Feel as though your whole body and mind is resonating
in harmony with the sound.
Imagine that you are simultaneously the transmitter and
the receiver of *Aum*.
You are like a radio station.
Be totally aware of *Aum*.
Continue in this manner for as long as possible, at least
fifteen minutes is reasonable.
Then stop *Aum* chanting and be aware of the pulse at the
eyebrow centre.
When you can distinctly detect it, synchronize it with the
mental sound of *Aum*.
Be aware of the internal sound of *Aum* at the eyebrow
centre, vibrating in harmony with the pulse.
Continue in this manner for as long as you have time.
End the practice by chanting *Aum* loudly three times.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Yoga Nidra

Yoga nidra means psychic sleep. It is a state of sleepless sleep where one is on the borderline between sleep and wakefulness. It is a state of inner awareness and contact with the subconscious and higher consciousness. A speaker or narrator is needed in the initial stages of practice. For this reason it is a good idea, if possible, to put the directions on tape. Later on you will remember the instructions and you can practise alone.

Practise yoga nidra lying down with the head flat on the floor, in shavasana. The body should be straight and the head in line, legs slightly apart and arms close to the body, palms upwards. Lie completely still; the body must be totally relaxed with the clothes loose. There should be no physical movement once yoga nidra has begun. The stomach must not be full and the eyes must remain closed throughout.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Practice of yoga nidra

Preparation

Kindly close your eyes and make yourself physically comfortable. You can readjust your physical position for some time if you like. Do not open your eyes until the whole practice is over. Try to follow the instructions mentally and not physically. Make yourself free from

intellectual analysis and understanding. You have to follow the instructions automatically. There will be physical, mental and psychic relaxation. You have to keep awake throughout. Do not sleep.

Do not begin your practice all of a sudden, but develop the consciousness in your mind in this way, 'Now I am going to practise psychic sleep. In this practice of psychic sleep I shall remain awake all throughout.' And develop in your mind the experience which you have had at night when you go to bed completely relaxed and repeat to yourself mentally, 'My mind is free, my body is free. I am preparing for relaxation. I am listening to the instructions.'

Now develop the awareness of your physical body right from the top to the toes and say in your mind *Ommm*.

Complete awareness of the whole body.

Complete awareness of the whole body.

Complete awareness of the whole body.

Resolve

You have to decide upon a resolve. You have to discover a resolve. You have to fix a resolve for yourself. Do not be in a hurry to make a resolution for yourself.

The resolve will have to be simple. Simple resolve, simple resolve, simple resolve. The resolve that you make during the practice of psychic sleep will come true. The resolve should be clear, direct and short.

During this practice the resolve has to be repeated twice, once at the beginning of psychic sleep and once at the end. The resolve that you make during psychic sleep is bound to happen in your life.

It is bound to fructify without any doubt.

If you can convince your mind, you can do anything.

After you have made your resolve you should again switch to the awareness of the physical body, and the whole body right from the top to the toes, in the form: 'I am, I am', or 'my body, my body'. Think of the whole

body at one time, in one glance, in a thought. Think of the whole body in one thought. Develop whole body awareness at one moment.

‘I am aware of my body, I am aware of my body.’ This way you think, mentally, and go on developing awareness of the whole body.

Then again think, ‘I am listening to the instructions, I am not sleeping, I am not drowsy, I am not conscious of external sounds, but I am relaxed and I can sleep at any moment and I have to be awake.’

Rotation of consciousness

Rotation of consciousness through different parts of the body. Repeat the name of the particular part in your mind and try to develop awareness of that part of the body just for a moment, not for a very long time. For instance, if I say ‘right hand thumb’, you have to say in your mind ‘right hand thumb’ without moving it, and then go on to the next. I will lead your consciousness to different parts of the body and the speed will be quite fast. Keep yourself alert, do not concentrate too intensely, just develop the awareness and try to move your mind as quickly as possible and as quickly as you are instructed by me. If at any time you are unable to keep up with the speed it does not matter, go ahead to the next. In the first round I will be slow, then I will gain speed. Please understand that you will have to say the name of the particular organ mentally.

Right side: Say mentally: right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, right toes, one, two, three, four, five.

Left side: To the left. Left thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, left toes, one, two, three, four, five.

Right side: Right again, from up to down. Right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist,

elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, right toes, one, two, three, four, five, sole, heel, ankle, calf muscle, knee, thigh, waist, armpit, shoulder, elbow, wrist, right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth.

Left side: Go to the left from the top. Left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, left toes, one, two, three, four, five, sole, heel, ankle, calf muscle, knee, thigh, waist, armpit, shoulder, elbow, wrist, palm, left thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth.

Whole back: Go to the back side, go to the back side. Take your mind to the back of the head which is touching the ground; the back side of the head, the back side of the head which is touching the ground. Right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, spinal cord, right hip, left hip, right buttock, left buttock, right side underneath the thigh, left side underneath the thigh, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, right ankle, left ankle, right heel, left heel.

Whole front: Go to the front at the top of your head, to the top of your head, the crown, the top of the head, the crown, the crown, the forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, centre of the eyebrows, right eye, left eye, right nostril, left nostril, right cheek, left cheek, right ear, left ear, upper lip, lower lip, chin, throat, right side of chest, left side of chest, the whole chest, navel, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right abdomen, left abdomen, right pelvis, left pelvis, right side of groin, left side of groin, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right toes, left toes.

Major parts: Now the major parts of your body. The right leg, the left leg, both legs together. Right arm, left arm, both together. The whole of your back, the whole of your front, the head, the whole body. Visualize the whole body, say 'whole body' and visualize the whole body. Say 'whole body' and visualize the whole body. Intensify your

awareness. The whole body, the whole body, the whole body, the whole body.

Breathing

Become aware of your breathing. Start to practise psychic nadi shodhana. With the count of five in each nostril and then in both nostrils together. Inhale to the count of five through the left nostril, exhale to the count of five through the right nostril; inhale through the right nostril to the count of five and exhale through the left nostril to the count of five. This is one round. Do five rounds. Then bring the awareness to both nostrils and to the count of five inhale through both nostril and exhale to the count of five through both nostrils. This is one round. Practise five rounds and then continue with the alternate breathing pattern. You are not using your fingers in the mudra to direct the flow of your breath. It is just through your awareness that you follow the breath. Continue with intense awareness for about two minutes.
(Pause)

Rapid images

Now become aware of these images as I name them . . . Shivalingam, standing Christ, a flickering lamp, a big mango tree, a tall palm tree, a car moving on the road, a burning fire, coloured clouds, yellow clouds, white clouds, blue clouds, clouds coming from the western side, clouds moving fast with the wind, a starry night, a starry night, a moonlit night, a moonlit night, a full moon, a dog standing, a cat lying, a horse racing, an antelope racing, an elephant moving, the sun rising, the sun setting, waves of the ocean, waves of the ocean, church bells ringing, over the church a cross, in the church a priest kneeling, a devotee praying, an airplane in flight, sandy beach, people relaxing on the hot sand, a red triangle, a golden spider web.

Resolve

Now again you will have to practise the resolve and repeat the resolve; make the resolve and repeat the resolve, one

and the same resolve, do not change it, the same resolve. Your subconscious is exposed to resolves now.

Ending the practice

Now become aware of the surroundings, any sounds you can hear. Be aware that you have been practising yoga nidra, the psychic relaxation practice. Be aware of your body and contact points between your body and the floor. Feel the breath moving in the body. Check that you are awake. Keeping the eyes closed, make physical movements of the body, and prepare yourself to get up. Keep the eyes closed, but make movements with the body. Prepare yourself to get up. Now get up and open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Pratipaksha Bhavana

The method of substituting an opposite thought or counter-thought, *pratipaksha bhavana*, enables one to lead a happy, harmonious life of peace and power. A thought of love will at once neutralize a thought of hatred. A thought of courage will immediately serve as a powerful antidote against a thought of fear. Ideas create the world.

When there is irritability, meditate on the virtues of tolerance and self-restraint. If depressed, fill the mind with the idea of joy and exhilaration. When sick, fill the mind with ideas of health, strength and vitality. Worldly thoughts, thoughts of enmity, hatred, revenge and anger will all die. Do not cause pain or suffering to any living being due to greed, selfishness, irritability or annoyance. This is a great sadhana.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

According to yoga, cultivation of an opposite thought, *pratipaksha bhavana*, is important to restrain the senses. If the eyes are attracted to something, create a thought and say to yourself, “This is nice, but the opposite is also nice.” If the eyes are craving beauty, the mind should also accept the ugly. In this way, the sensory attractions have to be balanced by cultivating the awareness of the opposite and not just identifying with that which is pleasurable and offers fleeting joy. The ability to realize both the good and

the bad must be developed because they are two sides of the same coin.

You don't have to interact with the person you consider your enemy, but in your mind, in your sentiments and understanding, that person can cease to be an enemy and just be an ordinary person.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Pratipaksha Bhavana Practice, April 2013, Ganga Darshan

Swami Sivamurti

The traditional yogic way to create balance is through examining our negative thoughts, beliefs and attitudes and where they came from, and then consciously cultivating their opposite. It is a way of saying 'Yes' to life and becoming positive at all times.

Sage Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* recommends the practice of pratipaksha bhavana, in sutra (1:33):

*Maitrikarunamuditopekshanam sukhaduhkha
punyapunyaavishayanam bhavanataschittaprasadanam.*

In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful.

In sutra (2:33):

Vitarkabadhane pratipakshabhavanam.

When the mind is disturbed by passions one should practise pondering over their opposites.

You are ready to create opposite thoughts, attitudes or responses to consciously superimpose the positive opposite over the negative ones. Repetition is essential for reprogramming. The more you work on superimposing positive opposing thoughts to negative ones, the closer you come to creating balance and harmony within.

“Cells that fire together, wire together.” Hebb’s rule (1949) – It is the mechanism by which repeated excitation of a postsynaptic cell by a presynaptic cell causes the synapse between them to be strengthened. Neurons that actively fire together retain strong synaptic connections. Each time you think and re-think about an event or perform a certain action the memory is strengthened. It is the ‘wiring’ of neurons that cements knowledge together along with the related facts.

When you start replacing negative thoughts and emotions with their opposite counterparts, the negative pattern in the mind undergoes a change. This process ‘short-circuits’ the negative progression of thoughts and emotions, and begins to de-condition our mind. It ensures that the influence of a negative thought or emotion has less effect on us.

There is no limit to the healing and creative power of your mind. When you fully acknowledge that your mind has the power to change everything about you for the better, you will feel free to calmly set about changing your state of mind and using your imagination to establish a new set of ideas.

An important point to remember: Do not try to fight negative thoughts for the more you try the more they will return.

Practice

Stage 1: Become aware when your thoughts, emotions, attitudes and reactions are negative. Allow ‘space’ for witnessing them. Simply becoming conscious is enough to begin altering a negative state.

Stage 2: Accept the fact that you need to change this negative pattern of thinking and feeling and reacting.

Stage 3: Realize that such thoughts, emotions, attitudes and reactions are disruptive to your peace of mind. They do more harm than good.

Stage 4: Understand that you can replace these negative thoughts, emotions, attitudes and reactions with positive and more cheerful ones.

Stage 5: Look for ways to strategically place an opposite thought, emotion, attitude, reaction. Imagine it, visualize it.

Pairs of opposites: Revengefulness – Forgiveness

Anger, irritability – Patience, Forgiveness, Love

Fear – Courage, Love, Humour

Worry, pessimism – Optimism, Faith

Resistance – Surrender, Acceptance

Lack of confidence – Self-esteem, Unconditional positive regard for oneself

Indifference, hatred, disgust – Love, Humour, Non-expectation, Acceptance, Contentment

Sadness – Joy, Activity, Humour, Love

Boredom – Wonder, Curiosity

Nervousness – Calmness, Faith

Stage 6: Become aware of any automatic pessimistic, self-diminishing, self-admonishing thoughts, emotions, attitudes and reactions you may have and place their opposites. Once you have identified what your negative thoughts and attitudes are, state them honestly to yourself and own up to them. It does not imply ignoring the reality of your negative thoughts, but acknowledging them and choosing not to reinforce them.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Review of the Day

(Hamsa Dhyana)

When you practise the Review of the Day, in the course of time, you will notice that as your awareness continues to grow, it will make you more alert to the conditions and situations being projected at you either by nature or by other people. Then you will be able to perceive what kind of environment you create within yourself, and how it could be changed so that you and others are benefited positively by it.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Practice

Every night before you go to sleep, analyze your day, from the time you woke up until the present moment:
What did you do?

How did you interact with people, circumstances and situations?

When did you feel angry?

Remember the situation, the circumstances, the people involved.

When did you feel confused?

Remember the situation, the circumstances, the people involved.

When did you feel depressed?

Was it a new situation? Was it some old stuff that caused you to feel depressed?

Just observe each moment of the day; run through each hour of the day.

If there has been some problem in any communication, notice it and think, “If I encountered the same situation again, is there a better way to deal with it?”

Remember not to judge yourself, don’t be critical, just observe. Observe the situation, the encounter and your reactions, external and internal, those no one knew about.

In this way, observe your responses and reactions on a day-to-day basis.

It only takes five minutes at night.

In the course of time, you will find that you are able to control your own reactive responses in a better manner. Analysis of the events of the day must be done after meditation, as you lie on your bed, when you are about to go to sleep, to clear your mind of all the clutter that has accumulated during the day.

Hari Om Tat Sat



The SWAN principle

This is a fascinating technique because we become aware of the various traits of human personality. It is called SWAN, not 'swan' meaning the bird; it is an acronym: S stands for strength of mind, W for weakness of mind, A for ambitions in life, and N for needs in life. We all have certain strengths, in some they are more active, and in others they are less active. We all have weaknesses, such as lack of self-confidence, fear, inferiority complex, and any kind of emotional or even deep psychic imbalance. We also have certain ambitions of which some are tamasic and some are rajasic. Recognizing this and letting go of these blockages is the culmination point of pratyahara.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Practice

Once a week, when you are free, take four sheets of paper and sit down in a quiet place. On one sheet of paper write down what you perceive to be your strengths and positive qualities. On another sheet write down what you perceive to be your limitations and weaknesses. On the third sheet write down what you perceive to be your aspirations, ambitions and expectations. On the fourth sheet of paper write down what your needs are, your real needs, actual needs, not supposed needs, but the actual needs to survive, to live, to be happy.

Develop this list. It won't happen in one day; it took me many months to make my own list, as one week I would write it out, then look over it and analyze, "No, this is not correct. I should cross this from here, I should add something here." Analyze it. It will take time: one month, two months, three months. Then you will be able to discover the traits of your personality and nature. You will be able to discover what your weaknesses and limitations are. You will be able to discover what your strengths are. When you encounter such situations in life where you have to confront your weaknesses and limitations, you will be in a better position to deal with that situation by cultivating the opposite quality, the strength that is the opposite of the weakness.

After you have made the list, pick one item, a sense of inferiority, for example, and work with that item for one week. Pick one weakness and one strength. Observe when that weakness affects you and observe in which moments you can cultivate your strength even more. Work with each trait individually, and if within one year you can work with one quality per month, in twelve months you will have overcome twelve limiting conditions and acquired twelve positive strengths. Work with one item first and learn to manage that. The SWAN analysis must be done once every week and this will allow you to know yourself.

After some time, you may want to do the practice on a daily base, and analyze yourself in regard to the interactions and situations you encountered during the day. Ask yourself: Which situation did I manage well, in the best possible manner, and what was the strength that made me act like that? Which situation did I not manage too well, not in the best possible way, what was my limitation, my weakness, my blockage that prevented me from acting in the appropriate manner? When did an ambition prompt me to act and what was the ambition or aspiration? What need manifested during the day, in which situation and how? What was the need, was it a real one or an imaginary one?

Ask yourself these questions and find answers, write it down in a SWAN diary every day and then look at it after a week or a month. Discover patterns in your behaviour, patterns of interacting, and decide if you want to continue like that or if you would like to change. Decide how you want to go about it? Which strength do you want to use to overcome a weakness, which ambitions are unnecessary, irrelevant and actually hampering your growth? In which area of your life can you reduce needs? Discover yourself and improve the quality of your being, performance and life.



Abstract Meditations on Who Am I? and Poems

You can meditate on anything, there is no limit. The following are only a few ideas which illustrate methods of meditation. Before trying any of them carefully read its contents. Try to grasp its deeper message and then try to experience its meaning. The reader should experiment for himself to find meditations that are in tune with his particular natural and inner feelings. Take various parts from different meditational techniques and combine them together, add your own ideas, and find a system that is especially suitable for yourself.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Who Am I?

Ask yourself the question, 'Who am I?'

Am I the physical body?

No, I cannot be, for this is in a state of continual change; last year my body was different to what it is now.

When I was a child, my body was different to what it is now.

My body is in a continual state of flux, of change, it cannot be my inner nature.

Am I my mind?

No, my inner nature cannot be the mind, for it is in a continual state of change; one moment it is happy, other times it is unhappy,

It is continually fluctuating in mood.
How can the mind be my true nature?
Am I a Hindu, a Christian, an Englishman, an Indian?
No, these are only minor forms of identity; they don't
represent my inner nature.
Continue asking yourself this type of question.
Then, 'Who am I?'
I am the witness behind the phenomena of the universe.
I am existence, unchangeable existence.
I am consciousness, pure consciousness.
I am indestructible being.
My nature is *is-ness*.
I am.

Hari Om Tat Sat

POEMS FOR REFLECTION

You are the Instrument

Follow the path of spiritual life.
Let nature take its own course.
Let it be whatever it is.
Why worry about these things?
Why be anxious?
Leave everything to the divine.
Who am I to do it?
He does everything.
He controls everything.
You think you are doing everything,
But it is not true.
Always know that you are the instrument
And He is the doer,
Whoever He is
Whatever His form.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Divine Symphony

When I open my eyes to the outer world,
I feel myself as a drop in the sea;
But when I close my eyes and look within,
I see the whole universe as a bubble
Raised in the ocean of my heart

—*Inayat Khan*

Perfect Oneness

To see a world in a grain of sand
and heaven in a wildflower,
hold infinity in the palm of your hand
and eternity in an hour.

—*William Blake*

IF . . .

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

—*Rudyard Kipling*



Ashtanga Yoga of Swami Sivananda Saraswati

The salt of life is selfless service, the bread of life is universal love, the water of life is purity. Hence, serve, love and be pure. The fragrance of life is generosity, the sweetness of life is devotion, the pivot of life is meditation. The goal of life is self-realization. Therefore, be pure and generous, be good and do good, meditate and realize the self.

Serve: The first step on the spiritual path is selfless service of humanity. Selfless service is the watchword along the road to salvation. Service always elevates and makes one divine. Service purifies, redeems and energizes. To live life through service is to be intimate with life's innermost secret. To serve humanity with sincerity and feeling is to be in union with the cosmic consciousness.

Love: Love is truth and love is good. It is the highest expression of the soul. It is the hope of the world. Wherever there is love, there is peace, and wherever there is peace, there is joy. One should spread the gospel of cosmic love throughout the world. Let the message of love reach the hearts of all and awaken brotherhood in the bosom of humanity. The world has to be encircled with a heart of love.

Give: One must help the poor, sick, forlorn, orphans and widows. If a person gives, the wealth of the world is his. It is the secret of abundance and divine life. Therefore, give, give, give. A person makes a living by what he gets,

but he makes a life by what he gives. If one gives in plenty, one will enjoy peace and prosperity, attain purity of heart and experience an indescribable thrill of divine ecstasy and spiritual bliss. This gives tremendous inner strength. An aspirant must radiate thoughts of goodwill and share what he has with others. He should use his material wealth, knowledge, and spiritual wisdom as a divine trust for the benefit of God's children. Prayer takes the aspirant halfway to God, fasting to the door of His supreme abode, and charity procures him admission.

Purify: Mental purity bestows calmness, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, victory over the senses and fitness to attain God-realization. The mind must be purified by the practice of virtues, self-control and devotion to God. A purified mind becomes a friend for it wears out the shell that covers the truth. There is no greater undertaking for any aspirant than purifying his life of enmity, hatred and passion, and filling it with love, goodness and peace.

Be good: Goodness is the highest virtue. It implies kindness, benevolence and morality. Positive habits have to be cultivated and good, sublime divine thoughts entertained. To be good is divine. If an aspirant wants to be good, he must see what is good, hear what is good, think what is good, do what is good, speak what is good, read what is good, write what is good, eat what is good and drink what is good. Ultimately, he will be good.

Do good: A good deed is never lost. It purifies the heart and leads to the descent of divine light and the dawn of divine grace. Every good deed is a seed of immortality. People should do all the good they can, in all the ways they can, to all the people they can, in every place they can, at all times they can, with all the zeal, strength and love they can, and as long as ever they can. Their nature must be to do good.

Meditate: Meditation destroys the causes of sorrow and pain. Regular meditation makes the mind calm and steady, and opens the avenues of intuitional knowledge.

When the practitioner enters the silence through deep meditation, the outside world and his troubles drop away, and he enjoys supreme peace. In this silence lies the light of lights, real strength and joy. He has to shut the doors of the senses and still his thoughts and emotions. When he sits motionless in the early morning hours, has a receptive attitude and communes with the Lord, he will enjoy the abiding peace of silence.

Realize: Everyone should live to realize the higher self within. No vision of truth or God is possible without annihilating the ego. The goal of life is God-realization.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati



Glossary

Abhyasa – constant and steady practice without any interruption and with faith

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness

Adharmic – unrighteous, not fulfilling one's duties

Ahimsa – non-violence in thought, word and deed; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga; see Yama

Ajna chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated at the medulla oblongata at the top of the spinal column in the midbrain; seat of intuition, higher knowledge; third eye

Anahata chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the sternum; associated physically with the cardiac plexus, heart and lungs, mentally with emotion, especially love, and spiritually with atma, the spirit

Antaranga yoga – internal stage of sadhana; includes pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother, who was the son of Lord Indra and Kunti. In the *Bhagavad Gita* he received a divine revelation from Sri Krishna

Asana – a specific yoga posture; used in hatha yoga to channel prana, open the chakras and remove energy blocks; in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour

Ashramite – resident of an ashram

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi; the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda: serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize

Ashwatama – son of Drona; see Drona

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings

Aum – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the Supreme Reality or Brahman; conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence

Bahiranga yoga – external stage of sadhana; includes yama, niyama, asana and pranayama

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind

Brahma, Brahman – God as creator; one of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva

Brahmin – the priestly caste; one whose consciousness is immersed in Brahman

Chakra – circle, wheel or vortex; pranic/psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis) in the body; the seven major chakras for descent of divine energy or for human evolution are sahasrara, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara

Chidakasha – the space of consciousness; the inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes or in the region of ajna chakra.

- Chidakasha dharana** – concentration on the inner space of consciousness; meditative technique
- Dama** – control of the outer senses; self-command through self-restraint and curbing the passions
- Darshan** – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy.
- Dharana** – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point
- Dharma** – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness; one of the four purusharthas; see Purushartha
- Dharmic** – pertaining to dharma
- Dhyana** – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga
- Drashta** – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; the inner self
- Drona, Dronacharya** – teacher of the Pandava and Kaurava princes; commander of the kaurava army in the Mahabharata war
- Durga** – goddess, wife of Shiva; remover of difficulties
- Duryodhana** – oldest of the Kaurava brothers; see Kaurava
- Dweshha** – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as aversion to the unpleasant
- Gayatri mantra** – sacred twenty-four syllable mantra which enables learning
- Guna** – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti (nature) are sattwa (luminosity), rajas (dynamism) and tamas (inertia)
- Guru** – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor

Guru tattwa – element and essence of the guru

Himsa – anything which disrupts the natural flow of human perception and consciousness; violence, killing, harm, injury

Hridayakasha – psychic space of the heart centre where the creative hues of emotion are observed; experienced between manipura and vishuddhi chakras, associated with anahata chakra

Hridayakasha dharana – vedic meditative process involving concentration on anahata chakra and the heart space

Ida nadi – a major pranic channel running from mooladhara chakra to ajna chakra, governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain; also called chandra nadi as the lunar energy flows through it

Jivatma, jivatman – individual or personal soul

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect

Kauravas – the thousand descendants of Kuru who, headed by Duryodhana, fought the fratricidal Mahabharata war against their cousins, the Pandavas, as recorded in the *Mahabharata* epic; see Mahabharata; see Krishna, Sri

Krishna, Sri – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga designed to hasten the evolution of humanity

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Veda Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it

Mahamrityunjaya mantra – the ‘great victory over death’ mantra, used to avoid calamities, for overcoming the fear of death; healing mantra

Manipura chakra – literally, ‘city of jewels’; psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the navel; associated with the solar plexus and digestive organs and mentally with willpower; source of vitality and energy

Manipura shuddhi – practices for purifying manipura chakra

Mantra – subtle sound vibrations which liberate the mind from its obsessive tendencies

Mooladhara chakra – the lowest psychic/pranic centre in the human body; situated in the perineal floor in men and the cervix in women; associated physically with the coccygeal plexus, excretory and reproductive organs, and mentally with the instinctive nature; spiritually it is the seat of kundalini

Mudra – gesture; psychic, emotional, devotional and aesthetic gestures; attitudes of energy intended to link individual pranic force with universal or cosmic force

Nadi – flow; a river or channel of energy; psychic current; subtle channel in the pranic body, conducting the flow of shakti; comparable to the meridians of acupuncture

Narada, Sage – celebrated devarishi

Niyama – observance of rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; the second step of the eight limbs (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: shaucha (purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), swadhyaya (self-study) and Ishwara pranidhana (surrender to God)

Pandavas – sons of Pandu: Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadev and Nakula; the five brothers who held an inter-family feud against the Kauravas as recorded in the *Mahabharata* epic; see Mahabharata; see Krishna, Sri; see Kauravas

Paramatma – cosmic Soul or Consciousness; Supreme Self; the atma of the entire universe; God

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga, including ashtanga yoga

Pawanmuktasana – a group of asanas that remove any blockages preventing free flow of energy in the body and mind; three groups of asanas: the anti-rheumatic group, the digestive/abdominal group, and the energy block releasing group (shakti bandhas)

Peeth – a special, sacred place dedicated to a certain purpose

Pingala nadi – a major pranic channel running from mooladhara chakra to ajna chakra, governing the right side of the body and the left side of the brain; also called surya nadi as the solar energy flows through it

Prakriya – process

Prana – vital energy; life-force; essence of life

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body

Pratyahara – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*

Pratyaya – seeds or impressions in the field of consciousness which do not disappear even in the first stages of samadhi; content of mind

Purushartha – human attainment; the four goals to be fulfilled in life: 1. wealth artha); 2. love (kama); 3. duty (dharama) and 4. liberation (moksha)

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure

Rama, Sri – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king

Ramakrishna Paramahansa – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known

version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters

Ravana – the ten-headed demon king of Lanka, who kidnapped Sita and was subsequently slain by Sri Rama

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint

Sama – renunciation of actions; equanimity

Samadhana – mental equilibrium, steadiness, peace of mind; see Shadsampatti

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga

Samatvam – equipoise; balance in life

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower.

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of self-oriented motives

Sannyasi, sannyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation

Sanskrit – language of the vedic civilization, still used in India and the yogic culture

Sanyam, Samyama – restraint, self-discipline; harmonious control of concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and samadhi fused into one process

Sat Chandi Mahayajna – a powerful fire sacrifice performed in honour of Goddess Chandi during which the Durga Saptashati is chanted one hundred times over several days

Satsang, satsanga – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good

Seva – service; selfless service; literally, 'being That'; to become one with the divine transcendental nature, and to express that nature in thought, word and deed

Shadsampatti – one of the four necessary qualifications for a serious spiritual aspirant according to *Aparokshanubhuti* of Adi Shankaracharya. Literally, ‘sixfold virtues’: equanimity (shama), self-control (dama), sensory withdrawal (uparati), endurance (titiksha), faith (shraddha), constant concentration on reality (samadhana)

Shama – mental quietness, tranquility; one of the six necessary qualities in an aspirant for realization; see Shadsampatti

Shiva – state of pure, individual and cosmic consciousness, original source of yoga. Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of transformation; destroyer of the ego and duality

Shraddha – trust, faith, belief; religious faith; sedateness, composure of mind

Shuddhi – purification, purity

Swabhava – one’s own essential nature

Swadhisthana chakra – literally, ‘one’s own abode’; second psychic/pranic centre; located in the coccyx; associated with the sacral plexus and governing the uro-genital system; the storehouse of subconscious impressions

Swami – literally, ‘master of the mind’; master of the self; title of sannyasins

Tantra – a most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices

Titiksha – endurance; bearing heat and cold and other pairs of opposites without complaint; see Shadsampatti

Ujjayi pranayama – a subtle pranayama often used during meditation; the psychic breath

Uparati – desisting from worldliness, indifference; see Shadsampatti

- Vairagya** – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion
- Vichara** – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth
- Vishnu** – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness
- Vishuddhi chakra** – literally, ‘centre of purification’, the psychic/pranic centre located at the level of the throat pit or the thyroid gland; it is the psychic centre particularly connected with purification and communication
- Viveka** – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha
- Vyasa, Sage** – name of a great sage who wrote the *Brahma Sutra* and the *Mahabharata*; and codified the four Vedas
- Yama** – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil; first stage of the eight limbs of yoga (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*: ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), asteya (honesty), brahmacharya (continence) and aparigraha (abstention from greed)
- Yoga** – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practices leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy
- Yoga Sutras** – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali
- Yudhishtira** – literally, ‘firm in battle’; name of the eldest Pandava brother in the *Mahabharata* epic

Notes



Swami Sivamurti, Acharya of Satyanandashram Hellas, Greece, was born in Sydney, Australia. In 1976, she met her guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, and was initiated into poorna sannyasa the same year. In 1977, she travelled to Greece to spread the teachings of Satyananda Yoga. In 1984, she established a residential ashram east of Athens, and centres in various cities and islands of Greece. She accompanied Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda on innumerable overseas tours. In 1993, she was recognized as a Yoga Acharya and in 2004, she was appointed an official emissary of Satyananda Yoga.



In April 2013, *Swami Sivananda's 18 ITIES and the Practice of Pratyahara* was the topic of a series of talks given at Ganga Darshan by Swami Sivamurti, Acharya Satyanandashram Hellas, Greece.

The *18 ITIES*, are eighteen positive qualities or virtues. The practice of these qualities leads the aspirant towards living a divine life. Swami Satyananda Saraswati made the practices of pratyahara the hallmark of Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati further developed pratyahara by making it a practice to be lived and experienced twenty-four hours a day. He emphasizes a yogic lifestyle, and therefore, brings the practice of the 18 ITIES back to the fore as an integral part of his teaching.

Swami Sivamurti presented these two lifestyle-oriented practices. Each quality is described in detail along with relevant stories and anecdotes to give a rich appreciation of the underlying concept. She then relates each quality to a stage of pratyahara, allowing the aspirant to systematically work with these concepts as a sadhana to be lived and experienced in everyday situations. These lectures motivate and guide the aspirant not only to practise yoga but to live yoga.

